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IN PRISON

Elizabeth Bishop

I CAN scarcely wait for the day of my imprisonment. It is then that my life, my real life, will begin. As Nathaniel Hawthorne says in *The Intelligence-Office,* "I want my place, my own place, my true place in the world, my proper sphere, my thing which Nature intended me to perform . . . and which I have vainly sought all my life-time." But I am not that nostalgic about it, nor have I searched in vain "all my life-time." I have known for many years in what direction lie my talents and my "proper sphere," and I have always eagerly desired to enter it. Once that day has arrived and the formalities are over, I shall know exactly how to set about those duties "Nature intended me to perform."

The reader, or my friends, particularly those who happen to be familiar with my way of life, may protest that for me any actual imprisonment is unnecessary, since I already live, in relationship to society, very much as if I were in a prison. This I cannot deny, but I must simply point out the philosophic difference that exists between Choice and Necessity. I may live now as if I were in prison, or I might even go and take lodgings near, or in, a prison and follow the prison routine faithfully in every detail—and still I should be a "minister without portfolio." The hotel-existence I now lead might be compared in many respects to prison-life, I believe: there are the corridors, the cellular rooms, the large, unrelated group of people with the different purposes in being there that animate every one of them; but it still displays great differences. And of course in any hotel, even the barest, it is impossible to overlook the facts of "decoration," the turkey carpets, brass fire-extinguishers, transom-hooks, etc.,—it is ridiculous to try to imagine oneself in prison in such surroundings! For example: the room I now occupy is papered with a not unattractive wall-paper, the pattern of which consists of silver stripes about an inch and a half wide running up and down, the same distance from each other. They are placed over, that is they appear to be inside of, a free design of flowering vines which runs all over the wall against a faded brown background. Now at night, when the lamp

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is turned on, these silver stripes catch the light and glisten and seem to stand out a little, or rather, in a little, from the vines and flowers, apparently shutting them off from me. I could almost imagine myself, if it would do any good, in a large silver bird-cage! But that is parody, a fantasy on my real hopes and ambitions.

One must be *in;* that is the primary condition. And yet I have known of isolated villages, or island towns, in our Southern states, where the prisoners are not really imprisoned at all! They are dressed in a distinctive uniform, usually the familiar picturesque suit of horizontal black and white stripes with a rimless cap of the same material, and sometimes, but not always, a leg iron. Then they are deliberately set at large every morning to work at assigned tasks in the town, or to pick up such odd jobs for themselves as they can. I myself have seen them, pumping water, cleaning streets, even helping housewives wash the windows or shake the carpets. One of the most effective scenes that I have ever seen, for color-contrast, was a group of these libertine convicts, in their black and white stripes, spraying, or otherwise tending to, a large clump of tropical shrubbery on the lawn of a public building. There were several varieties of bushes and plants in the arrangement, each of which had either brilliantly colored or conspicuously marked leaves. One bush, I remember, had long, knife-like leaves, twisting as they grew into loose spirals, the upper side of the leaf magenta, the under an ochre yellow. Another had large, flat, glossy leaves, dark green, on which were scrawled magnificent arabesques in lines of chalk-yellow. These designs, contrasting with the bold stripes of the prison uniform, made an extraordinary, if somewhat florid, picture.

But the prisoners, if such they could be called,—there must have hung over their lives the perpetual irksomeness of all half-measures, of "not knowing where one is at." They had one rule: to report back to the jail, as "headquarters," at nine o'clock, in order to be locked up for the night; and I was given to understand that it was a fairly frequent occurrence for one or two, who arrived a few minutes too late, to be locked out for the night!—when they would sometimes return to their homes, if they came from the same district, or else drop down and sleep on the very steps of the jail they were supposed to be secured in. But this short-sighted and shiftless conception of the meaning of prison could never satisfy me; I could never consent to submit to such terms of imprisonment,—no, never!

Perhaps my ideas on the subject may appear too exacting. It may seem ridiculous to you for me to be laying down the terms of my own imprisonment in this manner. But let me say that I have given this subject most of my thought and attention for several years, and I

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believe that I am speaking not entirely from selfish motives. Books about imprisonment I like perhaps the best of all literature, and I have read a great many; although of course one is often disappointed in them in spite of the subject-matter. Take *The Enormous Room.* How I envied the author of that book! But there was something artificial about it, something that puzzled me considerably until I realized that it was due to the fact that the author had had an inner conviction of his eventual release all during the period of his imprisonment, —a flaw, or rather an airbubble, that was bound by its own nature to reach the surface and break. The same reason may account for the perpetual presence of the sense of humor that angered me so much. I believe that I like humor as well as the next person, as they say, but it has always seemed a great pity to me that so many intelligent people now believe that everything that can happen to them must be funny. This belief first undermines conversation and letter-writing and makes them monotonous, and then penetrates deeper, to corrupt our powers of observation and comprehension—or so I believe.

The Count of Mount Cristo I once enjoyed very much, although now I doubt that I should be able to read it through, with its exposure of "an injustice," its romantic tunnel-digging, treasure-hunting, etc. However, since I feel that I may well be very much in its debt, and I do not wish to omit or slight any influence, even a childish one, I set the title down here. *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* was another of the writings on this subject which I never could abide,—it seemed to me to bring in material that although perhaps of great human interest, had nothing whatever to do with the subject at hand. "That little tent of blue, Which prisoners call the sky," strikes me as absolute nonsense. I believe that even a key-hole of sky would be enough, in its blind, blue endlessness, to give someone, even someone who had never seen it before, an adequate idea of the sky; and as for calling it the "sky,"—we all call it the sky, do we not; I see nothing pathetic whatever about that, as I am evidently supposed to. Rather give me Dostoyevsky's *House of the Dead,* or *Prison Life in Siberia,* Even if there seems to have been some ambiguity about the status of prisoners there, at least one is in the hands of an authority who realizes the limitations and possibilities of his subject. As for the frequently published best-sellers by warders, executioners, turn-keys, etc., I have never read any of them, being determined to uphold my own point of view, and not wanting to introduce any elements of self-consciousness into my future behaviour that I could possibly avoid.

I should like a cell about twelve or fifteen feet long, by six feet wide. The door would be at one end, the window, placed rather high, at the other, and the iron bed along the side,—I see it on the left, but

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of course it could perfectly well be on the right. I might or might not have a small table, or shelf, let down by ropes from the wall just under the window, and by it a chair. I should like the ceiling to be fairly high. The walls I have in mind are interestingly stained, peeled, or otherwise disfigured; gray or whitewashed, blueish, yellowish, even green—but I only hope they are of no other color. The prospect of unpainted boards with their possibilities of various grains, can sometimes please me, or stone in slabs or irregular shapes. I run the awful risk of a red brick cell; however, whitewashed or painted bricks might be quite agreeable, particularly if they had not been given a fresh coat for some time and here and there the paint had fallen off, revealing, in an irregular but bevelled frame (made by previous coats) the regularity of the brick-work beneath.

About the view from the window: I once went to see a room in the *Asylum of the Mausoleum* where the painter V——— had been confined for a year, and what chiefly impressed me about this room, and gave rise to my own thoughts on the subject, was the view. My travelling companion and I reached the Asylum in the late afternoon and were admitted to the grounds by a nun, but a family, living in a small house of their own, seemed to be in charge. At our calls they rushed out, four of them, eating their dinner and talking to us at the same time with their mouths full. They stood in a row, and at the end of it their little black and white kitten was busy scratching in the dirt. It was "an animated scene." The daughter, age eight, and a younger brother, each carrying and eating half a long loaf of bread, were to show us around. We first went through several long, dark, cellar-like halls, painted yellow, with the low blue doors of the cells along one side. The floors were of stone; the paint was peeling everywhere, but the general effect was rather solemnly pretty. The room we had come to see was on the ground floor. It might have been very sad if it had not been for the two little children who rushed back and forth, chewing their bites of white bread and trying to outdo each other in telling us what everything was. But I am wandering from my subject, which was the view from the window of this room: It opened directly onto the kitchen-garden of the institution and beyond it stretched the open fields. A row of cypresses stood at the right. It was rapidly growing dark (and even as we stood there it grew too dark to find our way out if it had not been for the children) but I can still see as clearly as in a photograph the beautiful completeness of the view from that window: the shaven fields, the black cypress, and the group of swallows posed dipping in the gray sky,—only the fields have retained their faded color.

As a view it may well have been ideal, but one must take all sorts of

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things into consideration and consoling and inspirational as that scene may have been, I do not feel that what is suited to an asylum is necessarily suited to a prison. That is, because I expect to go to prison in full possession of my "faculties,"—in fact it is not until I am securely installed there that I expect fully to realize them,—I feel that something a little less rustic, a little harsher, might be of more use to me personally. But it is a difficult question, and one that is probably best decided, as of course it must be, by chance alone.

What I should like best of all, I might as well confess, would be a view of a court-yard paved with stone. I have a fondness for stone court-yards that amounts almost to a passion. If I were not to be imprisoned I should at least attempt to make that part of my dream a reality; I should want to live in a farm house such as I have seen in foreign countries, a farm-house with an absolutely bare stone platform attached to it, the stones laid in a simple pattern of squares or diamonds. Another pattern I admire is interlocking cobble-stone fans, with a border of larger stones set around the edge. But from my cell window I should prefer, say, a lozenge design, outlined by long stones, the interior of the lozenges made of cobbles, and the pattern narrowing away from my window towards the distant wall of the prison-yard. The rest of my scenery would be the responsibility of the weather alone, although I should rather face the east than the west since I much prefer sunrises to sunsets. Then, too, it is by looking towards the east that one obtains the most theatrical effects from a sunset, in my opinion. I refer to that fifteen minutes or half an hour of heavy gold in which any object can be made to look magically significant. If the reader can tell me of anything more beautiful than a stone court-yard lit obliquely in this way so that the shallowly rounded stones each cast a small shadow but the general surface is thickly sanded with gold, and a pole casts a long, long shadow and a limp wire an unearthly one,—I beg him to tell me what it is.

I understand that most prisons are now supplied with libraries and that the prisoners are expected to read the *Everyman's Library* and other books of educational tendencies. I hope I am not being too reactionary when I say that my one desire is to be given one very dull book to read, the duller the better. A book, moreover, on a subject completely foreign to me; perhaps the second volume, if the first would familiarize me too well with the terms and purpose of the work. Then I shall be able to experience with a free conscience the pleasure, perverse, I suppose, of interpreting it not at all according to its intent. Because I share with Valery's *M. Teste* the "knowledge that our thoughts are reflected back to us, too much so, through ex-

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pressions made by others"; and I have resigned myself, or do I speak too frankly, to deriving what information and joy I can from this —lamentable but irremediable—state of affairs. From my detached rock-like book I shall be able to draw vast generalizations, abstractions of the grandest, most illuminating sort, like allegories or poems, and by posing fragments of it against the surroundings and conversations of my prison, I shall be able to form my own examples of surrealist art!—something I should never know how to do outside, where the sources are so bewildering. Perhaps it will be a book on the cure of a disease, or an industrial technique,—but no, even to try to imagine the subject would be to spoil the sensation of wave-like freshness I hope to receive when it is first placed in my hands.

Writing on the Wall: I have formulated very definite ideas on this important aspect of prison life, and have already composed sentences and paragraphs (which I cannot give here) I hope to be able to inscribe on the walls of my cell. First, however, even before looking into the book mentioned above, I shall read very carefully (or try to read, since they may be partly obliterated, or in a foreign language) the inscriptions already there. Then I shall adapt my own compositions, in order that they may not conflict with those written by the prisoner before me. The voice of a new inmate will be noticeable, but there will be no contradictions or criticisms of what has already been laid down, rather a "commentary." I have thought of attempting a short, but immortal, poem, but I am afraid that is beyond me; I may rise to the occasion, however, once I am confronted with that stained, smeared, scribbled-on wall and feel the stub of pencil or rusty nail between my fingers. Perhaps I shall arrange my "works" in a series of neat inscriptions in a clear, Roman print; perhaps I shall write them diagonally, across a corner, or at the base of a wall and half on the floor, in an almost illegible scrawl. They will be brief, suggestive, anguished, but full of the lights of revelation. And no small part of the joy these writings will give me will be to think of the person coming after me,—the legacy of thoughts I shall leave him, like an old bundle tossed carelessly into a corner!

Once I dreamed that I was in Hell. It was a low, Netherlands-like country, all the marsh-grass a crude artificial green, lit by brilliant but almost horizontal sunlight. I was dressed in an unbecoming costume of gray cotton: trousers of an awkward length and a shirt hanging outside them, and my hair cut close. I suffered constantly from extreme dizziness, because the horizon (and this was how I knew I was in Hell) was at an angle of forty-five degrees. Although this useless tale may not seem to have much connection with my theme, I include it simply to illustrate the manner in which I expect

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my vision of the outside world to be miraculously changed when I first hear my cell door locked behind me, and I step to the window to take my first look out.

I shall manage to look just a little different in my uniform from the rest of the prisoners. I shall leave the top button of the shirt undone, or roll the long sleeves half-way between wrist and elbow,—something just a little casual, a little Byronic. On the other hand, if that is already the general tone in the prison, I shall affect a severe, mechanical neatness. My carriage and facial expression will be influenced by the same motive. There is, however, no insincerity in any of this; it is my conception of my role in prison life. It is entirely a different thing from being a "rebel" outside the prison; it is to be unconventional, rebellious perhaps, but in shades and shadows.

By means of these beginnings, these slight differences, and the appeal (do not think I am boasting here, or over-estimating the power of details, because I have seen it work over and over again) of my carefully subdued, reserved manner, I shall attract to myself one intimate friend, whom I shall influence deeply. This friend, already an important member of the prison society, will be of great assistance to me in establishing myself as an authority, recognized but unofficial, on the conduct of prison life. It will take years before I become an *influence,* and possibly,—and this is what I dare to hope for, to find the prison in such a period of its evolution that it will be unavoidable to be thought of as an *evil influence.* . . . Perhaps they will laugh at me, as they laughed at the Vicar of Wakefield; but of course, just at first, I should like nothing better!

Many years ago I discovered that I could "succeed" in one place, but not in all places, and never, never could I succeed "at large." In the world, for example, I am very much under the influence of dress, absurd as that may be. But in a place where all dress alike I have the gift of being able to develop a "style" of my own, something that is even admired and imitated by others. The longer my sentence, although I constantly find myself thinking of it as a life-sentence, the more slowly shall I go about establishing myself, and the more certain are my chances of success. Ridiculous as it sounds, and is, I am looking forward to directing the prison dramatic association, or being on the base-ball team!

But in the same way that I was led to protest against the ambiguity of the position of those prisoners who were in and out of prison at the same time (I have even seen their wives washing their striped trousers and hanging them on the line!) I should bitterly object to any change or break in my way of life. If, for example, I should become ill and have to go to the prison infirmary, or if shortly after my arrival

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I should be moved to a different cell,—either of these accidents would seriously upset me, and I should have to begin my work all over again.

Quite naturally under these circumstances I have often thought of joining our Army or Navy. I have stood on the side-walk an hour at a time, studying the posters of the recruiting-offices: the oval portrait of a soldier or sailor surrounded by scenes representing his "life." But the sailor, I understand, may be shifted from ship to ship without so much as a by-your-leave; and then too, I believe that there is something fundamentally uncongenial about the view of the sea to a person of my mentality. In the blithe photographs surrounding the gallant head of the soldier I have glimpsed him "at work" building roads, peeling potatoes, etc. Aside from the remote possibilities of active service, those pictures alone would be enough to deter me from entering his ranks.

You may say,—people have said to me—you would have been happy in the more flourishing days of the religious order, and that, I imagine, is close to the truth. But even there I hesitate, and the difference between Choice and Necessity jumps up again to confound me. "Freedom is knowledge of necessity"; I believe nothing as ardently as I do that. And I assure you that to act in this way is the only logical step for me to take. I mean, of course, to be acted *upon* in this way is the only logical step for me to take.

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THE ESTHETIC OF THE FOUNDING FATHERS

William Phillips

The Myth

By all the devices of propaganda, the organs of the Communist Party have circulated the myth that there exists a ready-made set of esthetic principles, fashioned by the hand of Marx himself, and known as "Marxist criticism." In its name polemics have been conducted against "bourgeois criticism"; there were heresy hunts for "deviations"; and Marxist criticism was regularly invoked as the final arbiter of all literary questions. Yet what was actually presented as this revolutionary esthetic hardly went beyond a few platitudes about the political roots of art, while no extended treatment by Marx or Engels has ever been uncovered. Not that communist critics have failed to cite chapter and verse from the founding fathers as authority for their own dogmas, but these quotations were usually so vague and irrelevant as to lend themselves almost equally well to the purposes of anti-Marxist critics.

Such myths and distortions are hardly latter-day inventions, nor have they been solely the privilege of out-and-out opponents of Marxism, for Marx and Engels themselves, on more than one occasion, had to defend their doctrines against the interpretions of their disciples. Marx, for example, said of the French "Marxists," to whom the materialist conception of history was a substitute for the actual study of history: "All I know is that I am not a Marxist." And Engels, in 1890, wrote that he could not "exempt many of the more recent Marxists . . . for the most wonderful rubbish has been produced from this quarter too." In the realms of philosophy and politics, the classic mode of distortion, by those who have had some axe to grind, has been to tear one emphasis out of the many-sided theories of Marx, and to set it up as *Marxism*. Proof?—it is relatively easy to prove almost anything by ferreting out isolated quotations from the writings of Marx and Engels. But it is the Stalinist critics, here and in the Soviet Union, who are responsible for the most monstrous mystification, for they have created a "Marxist criticism" out of the whole cloth. In order to foster the illusion that the general theories of Marx

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about the relation of culture to society contain specific esthetic principles, they have vulgarized the theories and invented the principles.

The Heirs

Up to about 1935, the communist literary movement, claiming to be the legitimate heir of every last nuance of Marx, sponsored two doctrines, under the slogans, "art is a weapon" and "build a proletarian literature." In fact it is these two notions, carried to their farthest implications, which most people thought to be Marxist criticism. And quite naturally so, for the Stalinist position in literature had all the militancy and subversiveness commonly identified with revolutionary thinking. Moreover it had the plausibility of baby-talk—was it not, therefore, a doctrine for the millions? The logic was simple. If society is divided into two principal classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, argued the Stalinists, it follows that each class has its own art, and conversely, that art is so much advertising copy for the interests and the ideas of the class it serves. All art is propaganda! And since society has been ruled for centuries by the bourgeoisie, most art is bourgeois propaganda. The proletariat, however, in its struggle for power, requires an art which would coax the still-unenlightened workers and farmers into socialism. Hence a proletarian art must be immediately created, insisted the Stalinists, by those writers and artists who heard the call of the future. There were of course many ramifications, as critics, in their zeal to outdo each other in militancy, added their own prejudices to this general mythology of art, but in outline this was the position of the Communist Party in literature. And as was to be expected from such a theoretical *reductio ad absurdum,* the practice was even more absurd than the theory, but it would be almost sadistic to recall now some of the comic statements which were taken so seriously at that time in the pages of the *New Masses.*

It would be a mistake to regard the Stalinist version of Marx's attitude to literature as the *natural* error of an infant movement, for it was obviously inspired by the political line and the factional needs of the Communist Party. (A bit of research would have shown that they were mouthing many of the populist platitudes of Upton Sinclair.) What further proof is needed than the fact that when the Communist Party, in 1935, abandoned its revolutionary politics, it relegated its work-shirt theories of art to the archives of history? And when the new esthetic position, though it was a complete reversal of the old one, was likewise advanced as Marxist criticism, it became clear that the strategy of the Communist Party was to conduct its theoretical adventures under the auspices of Marxism. On the cultural front, Marxist criticism was the pseudonym of orthodoxy. And

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orthodoxy, to those tender-minded writers who always manage to adapt themselves to the party line, is the passport to Utopia.

The Fathers

The truth of the matter is that Marx was not a literary critic, and no amount of textual research can convert him into one. Nor was Engels. There is ample evidence that their reading was wide, and their taste good, and that Marx even intended to write a book on Balzac, but, so far as I know, they were silent on those internal questions of literature which occupy modern criticism. (It should be noted, too, that literature is the only art about which they had anything to say, implying that they might, perhaps, have been indifferent or insensitive to music and painting.) As for literature, they regarded it as one part, along with philosophy, law and religion, of what they called the superstructure of society, and their main concern was to find the social laws which governed the superstructure *as a whole.* Whatever specific remarks they did make about literature were *generalities* rather than *generalizations;* the bulk of these remarks consists of passing tributes to some writer of stature or to an entire culture, like that of Greece, and of warnings to overzealous critics and novelists among their disciples against the use of the economic interpretation of history as a means of dismissing literary movements. This is not to deny that Marx and Engels were bent on discovering the place of literature in society and were sensitive to the pulse of society in literature, but that is a far cry from the legend that they founded a Marxist criticism. And it is, indeed, this legend which is one of the chief obstacles to the actual development of Marxist criticism today.

At no time did Marx and Engels either state or imply that art is but a class weapon, nor did they sponsor a proletarian art to educate the workers in the theory and tactics of communism. On the contrary, Marx wrote in the *Preface to the Critique of Political Economy* that "certain periods of highest development of art stand in no direct connection with the general development of society, nor with the material basis and the skeleton structure of its organization"; and the later writing of Marx and Engels sought to correct the impression given in their earlier work that the economic (or class) factor is the sole and constant determinant of art. As to proletarian literature, in the often quoted letter to Minna Kautsky about one of her novels, Engels says, "You evidently felt the need of publicly taking sides in this book, of proclaiming your opinions to the world. . . . But I believe that the tendency should arise from the situation and the action themselves without being explicitly formulated, and that the poet is under no obligation to furnish the reader with a ready-made his-

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torical solution for the future of the conflict which he describes." In fact, many of the statements of the founding fathers on literature read like direct polemics against the kind of "Marxist criticism" advocated by Michael Gold and Granville Hicks until the People's Front blurred the very class distinctions on which their esthetic rested.

It was in the interest of orthodoxy, too, that Lenin, whose political genius was sufficiently great to be excused some lapses in esthetic insight, and who himself never pretended to be more than an amateur in the field of art, was constantly quoted in Communist Party journals as an authority on literature, painting, music—even dancing. Soon we were reading about the enormous contributions of Lenin to Marxist criticism. Yet Lenin had even less to say about the relation of art to society than Marx and Engels, for he took for granted what they were at so much pains to stress: that literature reflected, no matter how indirectly, the material development of society, and it was the development of society rather than that of literature in which Lenin was interested. Nor did Lenin seek to conceal this fact. In an article in *Pravda* (1922) on Mayakovski, Lenin wrote: "Today, I noticed by chance in *Isvestia* a poem by Mayakovski on a political theme. I am not qualified to praise his poetic talent, since I am well aware of my incompetence in this field. But it is a long time since I have experienced such pleasure, from the point of view of politics and administration. In his poem, he savagely ridicules meetings, and he mocks those communists who do nothing but go from one meeting to another. I do not know what to think of the poetry, but as for its politics, I can vouch for it, it is absolutely true."

From this point of view, almost purely social and ideological, Lenin examined such writers as Herzen, Chernishevski, Tolstoy, Gorki, in an effort to trace the impact of democratic and revolutionary tendencies on Russian literature and thought. Even his selection bore testimony to his purposes, for his few references to Turgenev are limited to criticism of his reactionary sympathies, and Lenin scarcely ever mentioned Dostoyevski, presumably because he was not, in any literal sense at least, a part of the great tradition of revolutionary ideas in Russia. If Lenin's insights into the social philosophies of Russian writers are of value as a background for any actual literary criticism, still Lenin himself can hardly be credited with even a groping in that direction. He was not only academic in his apparent indifference to the sensibility of writers, but his own sensibility was, on the whole, academic. He had no feeling and little understanding of the esthetic currents which shaped so much of contemporary literature. He is reported, for example, to have been completely unresponsive to those

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poetic compressions which Mayakovski inherited from European symbolism.

Who, then, were the trail-blazers of Marxist criticism? Three other figures, Stalin, Trotsky and Plechanov, have been cited in the past as having made important contributions to the Marxist study of literature. In fact, a few speeches of Stalin on the national question have been appended to a French collection of Lenin's writings on literature; but Stalin's entire theoretical contribution to Marxist criticism is contained in his observation that "the writer is the engineer of the human soul." One of his few direct literary judgments is his warning to the Russian masses (*Pravda,* 1935) that "indifference to the memory and to the works of Mayakovski is a crime"; but for the most part, Stalin's intervention in the arts is limited to administrative orders which seal the fate of artistic groups that happen to have the wrong political connections within the bureaucratic camp.

To Plechanov is given all the veneration due an ancestor—an important branch of the family tree—yet no specific ideas of his have been officially accepted by our twentieth century Marxists. It is his name, rather than his ideas, which has been taken seriously. Nevertheless, Plechanov did undertake a study of the history and problems of art. His erudition was wide; his sensibility, though not rooted in any creative movement, was at least that of a cultivated connoisseur; and his interest in the laws and mutations of art itself, apart from the social forces which ultimately affect it, enabled him to pose, if not to solve, some of the problems of Marxist esthetics. But he regarded art, fundamentally, as ideology, with the result that, as in his essay on Ibsen, he reduced works of literature to their philosophical equivalent. His method is perhaps best summed up in his famous law: "When a work of art is based upon a fallacious idea, inherent conflicts cause a degeneration of its esthetic quality"—a law which obviously sanctions the condemnation of all literature based on non-Marxist ideas. Besides, Plechanov had a flair for iron-clad laws, and he was at heart a utilitarian, so that he worked out a bewildering array of formulæ which are closer to the spirit of Calvinism than to Marxism. "Only that which is useful," says Plechanov, for example, "will seem beautiful."

As for Trotsky, despite the rhapsodic review of *Literature and Revolution* by Michael Gold in 1926, the docile writers associated with the Communist Party have sought to wipe out even Trotsky's literary criticism from left-wing thought. Yet Trotsky, of all the Marxian theorists, is the only one to have written literary criticism, for Trotsky not only saw in literature a mirror of society but he was acutely conscious of those qualities, which, taken together, make up

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the special vision of a work of art. *Literature and Revolution* is a study of Soviet literature right after the Revolution, of its schools, its problems, its individual talents.

The Soviet Union was in a period of transition from a semi-feudal, bourgeois society to a socialist one, and Trotsky was able to observe how writers, in the chaos of adjustment, reflected their shifting social bases in the very texture of their work. According to Trotsky, the Revolution ushered in a more conscious and more direct struggle between the values of the city and those of the country, and, where literature had formerly expressed its opposition to society from the point of view of a peasant nihilism, it was now poised between the peasantry and the proletariat. Unable to identify themselves completely with the philosophy of the proletariat, Soviet writers reflected the antagonism as well as the longing of the village for the city, some veering toward one pole, some toward the other. Thus Trotsky showed the roots of the Russian variety of imagism in the static and disconnected image of the world bred by the peasant way of life. Russian futurism, on the other hand, Trotsky regarded as the most revolutionary literary movement; this was due to the fact that futurism was the most extreme, bohemian—urban—reaction to the old society, and the Revolution had cut off the inevitable retreat of such a movement back to the bourgeoisie. In the poetry of Yessenin, however, there was an attempt, largely unconscious, to merge both of the dominant forces of the Soviet regime, for while Yessenin was filled with the sensibility of the city, it was the anarchy of color and sounds, the mechanized hysteria, rather than the order of purpose which he saw in the city.

Much of Trotsky's book, perhaps the most important part, is a polemic against those critics who were impatient with history and wanted to establish by decree a proletarian art. "It is fundamentally incorrect," says Trotsky, "to contrast bourgeois culture and bourgeois art with proletarian culture and proletarian art. The latter will never exist, because the proletarian regime is temporary and transient. The historic significance and the moral grandeur of the proletarian revolution consist in the fact that it is laying the foundations of a culture which is above classes and which will be the first culture that is truly human." It was this idea which was denounced for years by the Communist Party as a heresy and a slander to boot, yet the facts cannot be concealed, and the recent history of Soviet art has obviously borne out Trotsky's prediction.

It would obviously take an extended study to do justice to Trotsky's remarkable amplitude and variety of insights into literature and to track down his basic methods and premises. In the meantime, however, we have no reason to assume that Trotsky's work is the classic

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mode of Marxist criticism—a mode which is applicable not only to early Soviet literature but also to the general esthetic questions of our time. The fact is that Trotsky has never made a formal attempt to work out the problems of Marxist criticism.

The Method

So much for the myths and dogmas which have to be cleared away before we can consider even the possibilities of Marxist criticism. To this end Edmund Wilson, who is one of the most intelligent left-wing critics writing today, in an article on *Marxism and Literature* (*The Atlantic Monthly,* Dec. 1937) has exploded that fetishism of texts, according to which the answer to any literary question is to be found in some hidden remark by one of the founding fathers.

But Wilson goes further: for he dismisses not only the isolated texts but the Marxist philosophy itself as an effective instrument of literary analysis. "What Marxism *can* do, however," says Wilson, "is to throw a great deal of light on the origins and social significance of works of art. . . . Marx and Engels further deepened this (Taine's) study of literature in relation to its social background by demonstrating inescapably for the first time the importance of economic systems." And Wilson goes on to emphasize that Marxism, though it may enlarge the background of a critic, offers no methodological guidance to the study of literature: "Marxism by itself can tell us nothing whatever about the goodness and badness of a work of art. A man may be an excellent Marxist, but if he lacks imagination and taste he will be unable to make the choice between a good book and an inferior book, both of which are ideologically unexceptionable."

Taken literally, there can be no quarrel with Wilson's conclusions: since no philosophy or method, in itself, can tell us anything about the specific problems of literature, nor is a critic who lacks imagination and taste worth listening to, whether he be a Marxist, a Thomist or a formalist. And if, as Wilson implies, Marxism in literature is merely a preliminary research into social origins, we should be forced to admit that there can be no Marxist criticism—unless we regard as Marxist criticism the grafting of some traditional approach to art onto a Marxist analysis of society.

But is this not begging the question?—for what we want to know is whether a critic with taste and imagination is able to make more profound and more valid observations about literature through a use of the Marxist method; whether the Marxist philosophy so alters a critic's entire outlook that he approaches the subject, the form, the values, the sensibility, the tasks, of literature from a new angle; whether Marxism provides a method of perceiving the unique qual-

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ities of a writer while relating them to his social *milieu*. These are stupendous tasks involving a host of very delicate and complex problems, and they cannot be disposed of in a few syllogisms or by a flourish of rhetoric. Still, it is only in outlining the scope and the tasks of the Marxist method that we can decide its value for literary criticism.

Above all, the Marxist philosophy would alter the prevailing conceptions of the nature of literature and the function of criticism. And it is largely these conceptions which lie behind the resistance to a Marxist criticism—except, of course, when it is merely a matter of one's reactionary politics.

The chief objection comes from the fear that an all-embracing system of thought would do violence to the privacy of art and would fail to explain why one work is better than another. And it is a natural one—does not each artist express a personal vision in a personal style, thus transcending the influences at work on him? This was indeed the very criticism Sainte-Beuve made of Taine's sociological method: "This is the essential point which M. Taine's method and procedure do not touch. . . . The thing which is called individuality of talent, genius, remains always on the outside, escaping all the meshes of the net, however finely they may be wrought. And in general there is but one soul, a particular form of the mind to produce this or that masterpiece. When historical testimonies are in question, I can imagine equivalents: I know none in matters of taste. Suppose a man of great talent wanting, suppose the mold or rather the tragic mirror of a single true poet broken in the cradle at his birth, another will never be met with which will be exactly the same or will replace it. There is but one exemplar of every true poet." Yet Sainte-Beuve, like many critics who today seek some *rapprochement* with Marxism, was not unaware of Taine's contributions to criticism and he sought in some way to combine them with his own esthetic and intimate researches—realizing, however, that as he conceived the task, a union of two absolutes, it was hopeless. "The day," writes Sainte-Beuve, "on which the critic shall arrive possessing a profound historic and vital sentiment of letters like M. Taine, spreading like him his roots to the very source, while, on the other hand, shooting forth his green branches beneath the sun, and who at the same time shall not suppress, I may even say, who will continue to respect and respire the sober flower, with the delicate perfume, of Pope, of Boileau, of Fontaine, on that day the complete critic will have been discovered; the reconciliation between the two schools will have been effected. But I ask for an impossibility; one easily sees that this is a dream."

Here, indeed, is the difficulty, and as Sainte-Beuve testifies, it is

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an old one. Its modern form is to regard Marxism, on the one hand, and literature on the other as absolutes: Marxism as a closed philosophical and political system, and literature as a series of mutations in taste and sensibility, in the last analysis, as a mysterious essence taking different shapes at different times. Yet there is no law of Marxism which requires a critic to efface the unique qualities of literature; while the exemption on the part of most traditional criticism of these unique qualities from mundane analysis has brought us to the impasse where, although we have been zealously guarding the values and meaning of literature, we have still arrived at no way of explaining the meaning of the values or the value of the meanings. Marxism has, therefore, at least an experimental claim to our attention.

Not that there has been any lack of talent on the part of individual critics; on the contrary, much of our criticism is studded with remarkable insights of sensibility and judgment. The fault lies, rather, in the assumptions about literature with which criticism has started. With some exceptions and with countless variations, modern criticism has been either formalist or impressionist; and formalism is based on the idea that literature is composed of formal structures, while impressionism regards literature as a body of irreducible essences, privately conceived and defying analysis. So long, therefore, as we retain these conceptions of literature we are committed to some variety, however disguised, of impressionism or formalism; and to tack on a study of social backgrounds is merely to raise anew the question of how a personal vision, contained in a purely formal structure, can be related to the hum-drum business of society.

If, however, we regard literature primarily as a body of perceptions, ideas, feelings and values, whether they be expressed through myths and symbols or through documentation, new vistas of criticism open before us. Not that poetic qualities or formal harmonies would be ignored, but rather they would be seen as the medium through which some value, however fleeting, is expressed—as the tonality of a statement. Nor is this to deny what Trotsky wisely called "the laws of art": the ways in which the nature of the medium not only gives *timbre* to the ideas and feelings of the writer but actually modifies them. Each medium has its own *formal values*. Yet these, too, are historical—is not the autumnal sensibility of Eliot a kind of comment on the state of society? And is not Eliot's sensibility of a piece with his ideas?—with the result that, together, they make up a single set of values.

In this sense, literature, like science, is a materialistic medium, for its materials are drawn from man's experience and its discoveries reveal unsuspected relations within that experience. Each new discov-

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ery rejects some old value: hence the act of creation is an act of judgment,—of criticism, be it social or moral or purely sensual. Thus the *values* of the individual writer, whether negative or positive, are his reaction to the values of society, either directly or in terms of the conditions which have created them. Where, as in most works, there are ambiguities, it is obviously a case of the writer's having incompletely broken with the existing conventions; but a writer of any importance has a distinctive accent for he is trying to build some new values on the foundations of the old ones. It is, therefore, the values of literature which criticism must evaluate.

Such a conception of literature would save us from the pitfalls of formalism and impressionism. For it is these critical methods which rest on the tautology that literature is the sum of its formal qualities, and it is to these methods that we must return if we reject the idea that literature is a body of human values.

Where does Marxism come in? To begin with, Marxism is a materialist view of society which regards ideas and values as historical, on the premise that the way men think and feel is a result of the way they live. And Marxism seeks to alter the way men think and feel by altering the way they live. In this sense, the Marxist philosophy is a radical criticism of society, of its values and the conditions which give birth to and sustain them. But these are, after all, the primary tasks of literary criticism: to analyze and to judge literature; and it is at this point that Marxism is relevant, for it supplies a method not only for finding the social origins of values but also for determining their contemporary significance.

To illustrate: take Valery's idea of the universal man: an idea which might be enjoyed purely as a daring speculation—a poem. The Marxian method, however, by directing us to Valery's intellectual environment, would suggest a possible relation between Valery's paralysis of scepticism and the fact that his universal man, occupied solely with the mechanics of thinking, makes no specific contribution to thought. And his peculiar scepticism, which might be traced to the exhaustion of an entire tradition, is of a piece with the suspension of belief which the modern flight from romanticism has produced. Similarly, the values of Malraux, however distinctly they may be moulded by his sensibility, can be seen to be a stylization of certain adventurist political trends—a factor which can hardly be ignored in any finished judgment of Malraux.

Since, however, Marxism is not a closed system, nor a formula for declaring that *all* ideas inspired by other ways of thinking are false—since, for literature, at any rate Marxism is a *method*, it would be misleading to speak of Marxist criticism as an airtight system of

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ideas about literature and individual writers. No more than science can give a ready-made estimate of any new theory in physics. It would be mode fruitful, therefore, to speak of *Marxist criticisms* in the plural, or of *ventures in Marxist criticism*, especially since it has yet to be demonstrated that only one code of beliefs or one kind of insight into art is compatible with the philosophy of Marx. From this point of view I would regard, for example, Edmund Wilson's recent article on Flaubert as a contribution to Marxist criticism, for despite Wilson's disavowals of "Marxist criticism" he has certainly brought into his writing many of the values and much of the outlook of Marxism. And insofar as his observations are sensitive and exact, it would be a form of Marxist megalomania to consider them opposed to Marxism. If some other critic, claiming to be a Marxist, wishes to question the validity of Wilson's interpretations, he would have to show not only that Wilson has violated the materialist approach to literature, but that he has failed to light up the full complexity of Flaubert's writing. Failing any rule-of-thumb criteria, we must conclude that an analysis of literary problems or of specific writers which *flows from or is consistent with* a materialist version of society is a form of Marxist criticism—at least, in its infant stage.

Aside from any principled objections, there is at present widespread aversion to the tone of Marxist criticism. And not without justification, for much of what has gone by the name of Marxist criticism has been but a form of scholasticism in overalls. But it would be merely a sign of our own lack of discrimination if we were to lay the sins of the pretenders at the door of Marxism itself. For once criticism enters into the swim of social life, once it takes up the cudgels against all modes of academicism which work to freeze the present within itself—when it seeks to affirm, in its own way, the values which literature rescues from society—criticism should share in the imaginative possibilities which literature has always enjoyed.

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SPEECH FROM A FORTHCOMING PLAY

by virtue of by virtue, I,
by hereby virtue of the hereby powers vested in hereby me,
do hereby declare and say that in the opinion of this court you are completely guilty of any crime or crimes of which you are absolutely innocent;
and in the name of this great hypocrisy,
which, as you hereby know, can do no wrong,
being a society based upon the equality of importunity, irrespective of andsoforth andsoforth or andsoforth, with liberty and justice for all,
I hereby affirm that to the best of my knowledge and belief you have been conclusively proved,
in flagranti delicto, with full benefit of testimony,
to have committed a foul degenerate heinous and inhuman offense against your innocent and unsuspecting fellowcitizens, not to mention their lives their fortunes and their sacred andsoforth,
namely and to wit,
that hereby you were black in color at the time of your hereby birth.
In consideration of which, I,
by hereby virtue of andsoforth,
do hereby extend to hereby you, on behalf of the government of the Benighted States of Hysterica, that glorious andsoforth alternative which is the illustrious andsoforth prerogative of every andsoforth citizen; and which is in accordance with the dictates of justice and of mercy, as revealed to our forefathers in the Declaration of Interdependence; and which, in the ultraenlightened opinion of the supercivilized majority of the hyperhuman andsoforth race, constitutes a glowing andsoforth nucleus andsoforth of radiant andsoforth andsoforth:
e pluribus eunuch, or to make a long story brief,
I give you the choice of either being dead or of not being alive, nolens volens, whichever you prefer.
And in the sacred name of commonsense, I,
by hereby virtue and by hereby andsoforth and by hereby whathaveyou,

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do hereby pronounce and decree that hereby you shall be punished for said crime or crimes according to that unwritten law which, according to all rightthinking people, governs the actions of all rightthinking people;

namely and to wit,

that you shall have your right eye suitably excised with a very dull penknife, and placed in your mouth which has previously been opened with a hatchet;

that you shall be soaked with gasoline,

hanged with a rope,

lighted with a match,

cut down while you are alive,

slit up the middle by good women,

stamped on by little children,

and made to kiss the flag by strong men.

Finally: it is the irrevocable verdict of this impeccable court, in due session assembled, that your organ of generation, having been suitably tinged and bedewed with the liquid and solid excrement of all lawabiding citizens in general and of all patriotic persons in particular, shall be forcefully proffered to your own mother, who shall immediately and joyfully eat thereof under penalty of death.

In Hoke signo:

God save the people From the people!

God save All of the people for Some of the people!

God save Some of the people All of the time, and all of the people will take care of themselves.

AMEN.

E. E. Cummings

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ANDRÉ MALRAUX

F. W. Dupee

MATTHEW ARNOLD once said of Byron that the *Zeitgeist* had worked in his favor; but of André Malraux, who has put so much of recent history into his novels, it might be better said that he works for the *Zeitgeist*. His latest novel* is about the still unfinished war in Spain, which Malraux, as an organizer of the government air forces, experienced at first hand. The subject is controversial: a novelist would scarcely lay hold of it unless he had an axe to sharpen. And *L'Espoir* (Hope), partisan in its analysis of the war, partisan in its attitudes and values, is frankly a work of the higher factional publicism. But let us say at once that it is not the work of a journalist; it is the book of an artist who, far from forsaking his characteristic ideas, tone and methods, has simply adapted them to a new situation. He starts out from a point which is recognizable enough to those who know his former work. Where he ends up is another question.

Malraux underwent several years ago a partial conversion to revolutionary values, and he has since shifted his political allegiance more than once. But the twin obsessions of death and action have remained rooted in his mind throughout, conditioning at each stage of his development the special form of his ideas. His first important novel, *The Royal Way,* was a rather literal projection of his obsessions. Its world was an undifferentiated void of death and violence. Its characters were all of a piece. And although nominally laid in the jungles of Indo-China in the 20th century, the novel was in effect as little fixed in space as in time. But the abstract heroics of *The Royal Way* were soon abandoned for another mode. The heroic element persisted, but in *The Conquerors* it had already acquired a base in the contemporary world. The base, however, was largely a pedestal for the Communist Garine, who, solitary, ruthless, full of contempt for men and for history, repudiated the very cause he risked his life to serve: the revolution. The China of 1926, of general strikes and peasant uprisings, of imperialist manoeuvers, of the Kuomintang and the Comintern, was for Garine, despite his professional Communist

* *L'Espoir,* Gallimard, Paris.

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rôle, only a "spectacle." Now Malraux tried to motivate this psychologically so improbable situation by providing Garine with a hierarchy of hates: if he was contemptuous of the proletariat, he hated the bourgeoisie still more. But no social insights or values were involved in his discriminations. Basic in Garine was the obsession of mortality and the compulsion to thwart death by acts of desperate audacity. It was really a drive towards self-destruction; and the revolution, in short, was a means for committing suicide as heroically as possible in a world sapped of grandeur by the pervasive complacency of the middle classes. The hero of *The Royal Way* was an adventurer in time and space: Garine is an adventurer in politics.

But Garine is not the whole novel; nor is Malraux's interest in the plot defined by the nihilism of his leading character. There is the background—the general strike in Canton—which he explores with a genuine, if misdirected, historical curiosity. There are Cheng Dai, the wealthy liberal, and Hong, the terrorist—two of the sharpest political profiles Malraux has drawn. And there is Borodine, who represents his idea of the "professional revolutionary." But Borodine is an abstraction, and in his relations with Garine he remains entirely passive. Garine, therefore, incarnates the traditional nihilism, and Borodine the emotionally unassimilated Marxism, which were the author's heritage as a revolutionary child of the petty bourgeois intelligentsia. But Malraux was unable at this point to integrate the two worlds of value, and so, in *The Conquerors,* they merely confront each other across an abyss of mutual incomprehension; and the novel, striving to bridge the disjunction, breaks in two.

In Malraux's next novel, the hero and the spectacle, communism and nihilism, have acquired a more satisfactory relation. The revolution, in *Man's Fate,* has entered and transformed the concept of mortality. The hero now combines *in himself,* as a conflict of imperatives, the death-ridden solitude of the individualist and the fraternal drive of the revolutionary collectivity. And he tries to escape his fate as a man, not, like Garine, in political adventures, but in political *action* undertaken in the name of the collectivity. The characters accordingly have a psychological unity, and the novel, with its closely-textured prose, its tight structure, its rhythm of alternating revery and action, its variety of inner patterns and nuances, has a dramatic unity to correspond. For if the Imperialists, on the one hand, and the Revolutionists on the other, reflect in their different rôles Malraux's sense of historical values—if, in other words, the Kyos are 'sympathetic' and the Ferrals 'unsympathetic'—they are all in the end equally figures in a single pattern, which is the pattern of human "fate."

Thus Malraux accomplished in *Man's Fate* an imaginative con-

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junction of moral principles which, in the real world, would of course refuse to combine. *Man's Fate* is accordingly more a dramatization of an intellectual predicament than a realistic study of the peculiar psychology of the revolutionary movement itself. And this, in fact, describes Malraux's work as a whole, defining at the same time his relation to the social forces of his time. The revolution is a value to him chiefly as it affects the world of ideas—the world, that is, of the intelligentsia. He does not throw in his lot with the proletariat but, like most writers, remains with a foot in both camps. The revolution is not static, however; it ebbs and flows with the motions of the world proletariat and the fortunes of its parties. And the intelligentsia, slung between two classes, materially dependent on the bourgeoisie, but facing spiritually towards the proletariat, vibrates to the rhythm of advances and retreats in the working class. And Malraux's career reflects, more faithfully than that of most writers, the periodic crises of the European intellectuals in a period when the revolutionary movement, dominated by the Comintern, has itself set the world an example in mutability.

Given the death-action antithesis, his heritage of romanticism, Malraux seems to have worked out a special rationale to justify his shifting relations with the revolutionary movement and its various factions. The clue to it may be found in *Man's Fate,* in Kyo's words to the Comintern representative: "In Marxism there is the sense of a fatality, and also the exaltation of a will. Every time fatality comes before will I'm suspicious." Kyo says this in criticism of the Comintern for refusing to take steps to forestall Chiang Kai-shek, who is obviously preparing to crush the Communists. The political incidence of *Man's Fate* thus appears to be anti-Comintern and would seem to embody a semi-Trotskyist criticism of the Stalinist policy of unprincipled collaboration with the Kuomintang, which Malraux had exhibited so sympathetically in *The Conquerors*. But there is a good deal more than this to the story of Malraux's politics. *Man's Fate* was written some five years after *The Conquerors*. The political situation had meanwhile changed profoundly. Reacting from the Chinese disaster, the Comintern had entered on its so-called Third Period, a phase of extreme sectarianism, and its influence was now negligible. Trotsky, however, with his appeals for a workers front against fascism, seems to have exerted some influence over Malraux at this period, and it may be that he now identified the "will to action" with the exiled Bolshevik, "fatalism" with the quiescent Comintern. But once the Comintern, confronted by Hitler in power, reverted to its old policy and proclaimed the people's front, it seems to have recaptured its title to the Marxist "will"; and Malraux once more reversed his sym-

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pathies. Trotsky now became "a moment in the past," and those who continued to uphold revolutionary principles became so many utopian moralists. It was now clear that Malraux had merely projected his own dilemma into Marxism; and that the concept of "will" or "action" had no genuine political content but tended, on the contrary, to be synonymous with power politics, with adventurous bids for an ephemeral "success," in a word, with class collaboration. The irony is that by equating success with class collaboration, and identifying himself with the spectacular but ill-starred Comintern, Malraux has in reality written "the epic of defeat."

In 1935 Drieu la Rochelle, the French novelist, made some intelligent observations on Malraux in his relation to the Comintern. The Communist epic of Malraux, he said, is an epic of defeat. Beginning with the disquieting victory of Chiang Kai-shek, it has ended for the present in the devastating passivity of the German Communists. And now, by order of Stalin, the Communist Party "renounces its exotic dream of extremist violence" and proclaims the people's front against fascism. Will Malraux alter the content of his novels? One awaits, Rochelle concluded, the first Communist novel of the democratic defense.

Days of Wrath was not precisely this novel, but it was a product of the transition. Directly inspired by the events of 1933-34—Hitler, the concentration camps, the Reichstag fire trial, Dimitrov—*Days of Wrath* was a lyric novel of the communist *agonistes*. Once more a change has taken place in the conception of the hero. While Kyo combined in himself the sense of mortality and the will to action, Kassner embodies the will alone. To all the characters in *Man's Fate* death possessed a metaphysical reality—a kind of substitute for original sin, it was the common property of mankind, providing the basic motivation for the behavior of individuals, imposing a pattern of human destiny on the pattern of the class struggle. But now, in *Days of Wrath,* death is centered in the purely secular image of the prison where Kassner is confined; life in the fellowship of the anti-fascists. The characters are no longer preoccupied with death as a fatality; they are trying to escape death as a political penalty. And it is no longer their intense, atomic individuality which isolates them from one another, but the walls of their prisons. *Days of Wrath* was thus the incarnation of a new idea: that abortive Stalinist humanism which flourished, full of fresh hope for mankind, brief and bright as a dream, in the years of change: 1934-35—after the close of the third period and before the full flowering of the fourth, after the dark night of sectarianism and before the hard and disillusioning glare of the peo-

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ple's front in power; after the completion of the first Five Year Plan and before the Moscow Trials.

If *Days of Wrath* was a work of the transition, *L'Espoir* is "the novel of democratic defense" in its ripest form. Although it embraces only the first phase of the war, ending with the battle of Guadalajara, *L'Espoir* is a long book, its structure is complicated if not complex, and its characters are almost as numerous as the facets of war itself. In the first chapter, laid in Madrid in the early days of the uprising, the railway workers union has taken charge of the telephone exchange at the North Station; and Manuel, a young Communist, is calling one after another the chief cities of Spain. In this way, Manuel ascertains which cities are loyal to the government and which have succumbed to the fascists; and the reader learns in a flash the military situation in Spain. . . . Leaving the station Manuel goes out into the streets of Madrid. The night is full of crowds and clenched fists. Everywhere there are cries of *salud* and snatches of the Internationale. And trucks loaded with militiamen are travelling towards the Sierra at 70 miles an hour. The government has ignored for so many weeks the imminent military revolt, and the masses have grown so tense waiting for it, that this night of open war comes as "an immense liberation." Workers and shopkeepers are united in the "strange fraternity" of the people's front. . . . And the political situation? "The workers' organizations controlled the city (Malraux tells us) while waiting for instructions from the government." But the government is pictured as being too paralyzed to act for itself, and seems rather to be "waiting for instructions" from the workers.

In Barcelona, unlike Madrid, there is fighting in the streets. The churches which sheltered fascists are burning. The Hotel Colon, headquarters of the uprising, is beseiged by impromptu militiamen from the Anarchist federation. Factory sirens are screaming in alarm and the pigeons are wheeling in clouds above the barricades. Malraux describes with much precision and lyrical power the peculiar terrors of street fighting, the exaltation of an armed proletariat. But exaltation, he tells us, is not enough. We meet the Anarchist Puig, who, like all Malraux's spokesmen, is a leader, a *responsable*. Watching the extravagant beroism of his comrades before the Hotel Colon, he decides that they are dying needlessly; their sacrificial gestures are vestiges of an age of despair, when "all political problems resolved themselves into questions of audacity and character." But today there is hope, and "it is no longer a question of setting examples but of being victorious." What his comrades need, he feels, is to be "co-ördinated."

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Puig's observations betray the main drift of the novel—its theme will be the ordering of the Loyalist forces—and at the same time the behavior of the Anarchists, their fatalism, their heroics, their apparent indifference to death and defeat, reminds us of Ch'en and Kyo, and suggests an ideological link with the earlier novels.

In taking as his theme the coördination of the armed forces, Malraux confronts the central problem of Loyalist Spain. But he fails by a very considerable margin to confront it squarely. The problem was essentially political; Malraux treats it as a purely military dilemma. It involved the most vital revolutionary principles: Malraux poses it as a question of common sense as against utopian folly. It precipitated the fatal split in the labor movement, culminating in the tragic May Days in Barcelona and thrusting the war into its long stalemate; Malraux disposes of its main issues in a single dialogue.

The principal disputants in this brief but important dialogue are Magnin, commander of the International Squadron, and Garcia, formerly an ethonologist but now an officer in the Intelligence Service, who figures throughout the novel as Malraux's most intimate spokesman. Pointing to the highly mechanized aid which Germany and Italy are putting at Franco's disposal, Garcia proposes a sharp shift in the method of conducting the war.

"This war is going to be a technical war (he says) and we shall have to conduct it and not talk about sentiments." We cannot, he thinks, expect the working class leaders "to become specialists by visitation."

But, Magnin objects, it is the people who have held the Sierra.

"My dear sir (replies Garcia), we are sustained and poisoned at the same time by two or three sufficiently dangerous myths. First of all the French one: the People, with a capital P., made the French revolution. So be it. But it does not follow that, because a hundred pike-staffs were able to win against a few bad muskets, a hundred hunting-guns can vanquish a good airplane. The Russian revolution has further complicated things. Politically, it was the first revolution of the 20th century; but notice that in a military sense it was the last of the 19th. The revolutionists had barricades, but the Czarists had neither tanks nor aviation. . . . Spain today is covered with barricades —against the aviation of Franco."

A companion of Garcia's adds that "never before have militiamen fought a modern army. The Wrangels were beaten by the Red Army, not by the Partisans."

And, in short, the revolution in its present stage is the "Apocalypse of fraternity" and it is their modest function to organize the Apocalypse.

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The interview ends. Magnin can think of no more objections. And having served his turn as a foil in controversy—and such an obliging foil!—he reverts to his rôle as Malraux's ideal observer in the air forces.

Garcia's technocratic fancies need no very prolonged refutation. Military technique, as we know, keeps pace with the development of the productive technique; their mutual relation has not been altered by the century and a half of material progress since the French revolution. We know, also, who it is that runs the machines—and the machine-guns—in our society; in fact, the workers are by definition technicians without portfolio. And finally, if the proletarian leaders cannot be expected "to become specialists by visitation," who, then, organized that Red Army which Garcia cites with so much unction? . . . No, it is not the Russian revolution that "complicates things" for the Garcias. It is the *Spanish* revolution. In these cases a "savior of the revolution" is always sought, who invariably turns out to be a savior of the bourgeoisie. Garcia's imaginary caste of engineers is the counterpart of Kerensky, who would have saved the Russian revolution —for Kornilov; of Noske and Scheidemann, who saved the German one—for Hitler. In Spain's case, some fine rhetorial apologia must be made for the strategy by which, thanks to the Comintern, military authority was lifted from the workers militias and restored to the bourgeois state, fortifying that infirm institution and extirpating the vital root of the revolution—and the "elite of technicians" makes as good a *deus ex machina* as any. Now if we consult the record we find that, in fact, no group in Loyalist Spain opposed a centralized anti-fascist army. The militants split with the Stalinists over the question of *control*—whether it should remain in the hands of the workers or be restored to the bourgeois government. There existed no such benign and disinterested fellowship of engineers as Malraux conjures up. It was a question of the bourgeois government *or* the workers' organizations. Malraux's elite of technicians recalls the moral elite or revolutionary priesthood which Silone proposed as a substitute for the Marxist party, in *Bread and Wine*. Both ideas reflect, no doubt, the failures of the Comintern, but where Silone's is candid and is directed *against* the bureaucracy and *towards* the masses, and illuminates as with the flash of a great metaphor the moral and social bankruptcy of Stalinism, Malraux's theory seems a euphemism which not only plays into the hands of the party bureaucracy as against the masses, but obscures the real alternatives in Spain, the real nature of the choice that was made there.

Given its premises, we may expect *L'Epoir* to treat in much

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detail of military matters, and this it does. The real hero is the Republican Army, taking shape from the workers militias and coalescing by degrees into a single big organization, under "unified command" and subject to the bourgeois state. The structure of the novel is determined by the logic of the war itself, and the characters function largely as observers and commentators on the various fields of action. Most of the time, in fact, we feel as though we were reading the memoirs of some superior, people's-front-minded reporter, a Hemingway or a Matthews, who has collected hundreds of impressions and anecdotes and is in haste to get them all into his book—all the campaigns of the war, the famous exploits, the headline personalities, the picturesque details—from *La Pasionaria* to the agitational broadcasts across no-man's-land, from the fascist spies in the Anarchist federation to the salvaging of the El Grecos. Lost in this enormous mass of documentation, the character element in *L'Espoir* is dwarfed and pallid, and seems like the forlorn vestige of some obsolete literary form. The Manuels and Garcias, lacking any life of their own with which to impose an intimate pattern on the military microcosm, are merely spokesmen for this or that point of view. But even here, in the field of moral argument, where the characters compare their values, the atmosphere is close and guarded; and like the people, the philosophies—but especially those opposed to the prevailing discipline —fail in the last analysis to materialize. Liberals, Anarchists, none is quite free to develop the drama inherent in his point of view; none is allowed, as Hong was in *The Conquerors,* almost to reverse the currents of sympathy set in motion against him by the author; but in the long run all have the mechanical articulation of marionettes whose possibilities are finally delimited by the sum of their moveable joints and the will of the ventriloquist.

L'Espoir is a product of the *will*: and not the literary will but the will-to-action which, with Malraux, has finally taken its place. If we compare this novel with *Man's Fate,* where an artist's consciousness is manifest in each nuance of form and meaning, we see that he has transformed the revolutionary novel into a vehicle for thinly-fictionalized reportage—vivid and readable, to be sure, but without form or unity, and with only the meagerest human content. The defects so far pointed out in *L'Epoir*—the signs of hasty construction, the symptoms of inhibition—must be laid to the exigencies of people's front progandism, whose pressures are felt as intimately by a world writer like Malraux as by a *New Masses* reviewer. And we notice before we have read very far in the novel that it embodies other, more significant concessions to the current demagogy; and that many of Malraux's characteristic ideas have been transmuted or

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adapted to conform to its demands.

In the first place the elements of his "world" have been shaken up and put together in a new design; and some of the more important features of the old pattern have been omitted from the new. The world of *L'Espoir* is defined by the aggregate of the people's front and encompasses the extremes of neither right nor left. The evils of Franco totalitarianism are taken for granted; its destruction is assumed in the principle of Hope, and Hope is equally an imperative for all the characters. The fascists consequently do not figure in the intimate moral scheme of the novel; they are the abstract Enemy, authors of the tragedy, super stagehands, and that is all. Now this alienation of the capitalists—for the fascists are but capitalists!—is an expression of people's-frontism, which, because it must ignore the existence of capitalism in order to maintain relations with the "liberal" bourgeoisie, deprives the fascist of a material base in human society and turns him into a monster from Mars. It is true that Malraux, speaking through his inveterate oracle, Garcia, offers the fascist a remote psychological footing in reality by attributing his politics to the "cult of humiliation." But since he is not permitted to practise his cult in the pages of the novel we are forced to take Garcia's word for it. Compare, then, the straitened world of *L'Espoir*, circumscribed by the contours of a transient and ill-fated political bloc, with the inclusive world of *Man's Fate*—where right, left and center are all present and duly evaluated in terms of their historical rôles—and you have the difference between reality soundly projected and judged, and reality deformed by the crooked glass of a reactionary dogma.

But the revolutionary socialists have been even more neatly eased out of moral existence. In the first place, they are ignored. The POUM is mentioned once, in a purely statistical connection; the Fourth International once also, by a minor character who was formerly *"dans le trotskysme"* but has since repudiated it. In the second place, their rôle is played by the people's front itself, which is assumed to be intent on making the revolution as soon as possible—republicans, Catholics and all! Now the Stalinist propaganda machine, like the Church, has its special indulgences as well as its characteristic prohibitions. A writer who is headed towards a party conclusion is at liberty to arrive there by any route he pleases. And providing he depicts no fundamental contradictions in the sacred totality of the people's front, he may improvise *ad lib.* on the question of the revolution and the opposition. In the case of Spain he is free to follow the official rationalization, according to which the war is a struggle between fascism and bourgeois democracy (and this line he usually *does* follow when he is addressing liberals), or if he has an audience of "leftist" intel-

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lectuals, he may picture the people's front as a revolutionary body hiding behind conservative slogans in order "not to alarm the middle classes." And *L'Espoir* is plainly addressed to leftist intellectuals. As a writer who enjoys literary distinction among radicals of all shades, but more particularly as a writer who was himself close to *le trotskysme,* Malraux can be most effective by pointing his work, with its elaborate rationalizations of the left-wing *status quo,* towards the ever-growing anti-Stalinist movement. So his characters are allowed to *assume* the revolution; and instead of calling the opposition "mad dogs" or "agents of Franco"—official terminology repellent to the genteel atmosphere of the novel—he simply drops them out of the picture.

But a totality, however sacred, makes poor material for dramatic literature. So Malraux, obscuring the real nature of the struggle over coördination, ignoring the whole revolutionary opposition, finds in the Anarchists a politically harmless equivalent for the element of dramatic conflict. And it turns out that the Anarchists are the lineal descendants of Ch'en and Kyo. They have absorbed, that is, the death obsession, the "cult of sacrifice," the passion for lonely heroics—all the futility that goes with an historically obsolete individualism. We encounter several examples of the species libertarian. We have, first, the intellectual, who debates with Communists the meaning of the revolution, the issue of ethical as against political action, and emerges as a sympathetic but obviously forlorn Christ of the revolution. (There is good reason to suspect that, in these passages, Gide, Silone and other anti-Stalinist intellectuals are being treated to a vicarious lecture on "Bolshevism"). The libertarian identifies Marxism with Stalinism, and his Stalinist opponents appeal to Marxist doctrine to justify the very symptoms of bureaucratic degeneration which the libertarian deplores. Lively and inventive, filled with the ghosts of ideas if not their substance, these conversations are nevertheless as abstract as the characters themselves; they seldom involve any of the real issues in Spain; they take place in an atmosphere of sentimental conviviality which hides the actual core of antagonisms—they are, in short, "set pieces," chessboard manouvers with Malraux working from both ends of the board at once; and their aim is to give an intimate reflective appearance, a sense of values weighed and tested, to a narrative which is in essence a monolith of factional reportage.

The illusion of moral freedom for the characters is further impaired by the fact that the various philosophical alternatives are constantly confronted by their political equivalents, and so "exposed" on the practical plane as well. Indeed, it seems to be the conscious object of *L'Espoir* to disinfect the world of all alternatives to the drill-squad absolutes of Stalinism. And just as the Comintern politicos try to

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impose the people's front tactic on all countries, regardless of their internal needs, so *L'Espoir* exhibits a war situation, one that calls for exceptional modes of action, and then expands these into universal values. The libertarian intellectual, at any rate, is significantly shadowed by his political counterpart, the humble Anarchist rank-and-filer. We have already seen him in action in Barcelona, but as the crisis over coördination sharpens, he is shown in a light less and less sympathetic, and in the Toledo scenes he reaches his nadir. Ignorant of military science, he is sullen under discipline, and at critical moments he turns "ugly." Suspicious of treason among his superiors, he nevertheless harbors spies in his own organizations. One minute he is brave to the point of madness, and a moment later he is running away. We know the type: he has strayed out of one of Victor Hugo's "mob" scenes.

Now it is one thing to question the moral values of libertarianism: in doing this Malraux is only exposing, with whatever simplifications, an obsolete ideology. But it is another thing altogether to travesty the Anarchist worker, for here he is attacking the Spanish proletariat itself. What are the real features behind this contemptuous caricature of the Anarchists? Their "suspicion" is simply the vigilance of a class many times betrayed. Their repugnance to "discipline" is the canny reluctance of the worker to accept the bourgeois discipline of the people's front. And their "cult of sacrifice"—ugliest parody of them all!—what is this but the native miltancy of the exploited?

Vigilance, militancy—to these, the dynamic virtues of the revolution, Malraux opposes . . . "prudence, rigor, discipline." Manuel, the young Communist of the first chapter is perhaps the best example of the total morality of *L'Espoir;* and he is, in fact, represented in a symbolic light by Malraux himself. An intellectual before the war, Manuel's past seems to have been designed expressly to set off his present state of mind. For it is as a soldier who has repudiated the vagaries of intellectualism that he figures in *L'Espoir*. He has put aside the "cult of dissidence" for the "cult of action." He has exchanged ideas for ideology. He has put off his obsessions and put on a uniform. And he proceeds to demonstrate the intensiveness of his conversion by climbing in a few short weeks from the Communist ranks to a lieutenant-colonelship in the Republican Army. But the curious thing about Manuel is that he acquires his new wisdom, not from his comrades, but from a colonel of the Civil Guard, under whom he serves. This Catholic and police chief, who has been shooting workers for years, has for reasons only vaguely specified thrown in his lot with the Loyalists. He has been transformed, we gather, by the "strange fraternity" of the people's front, which Malraux habitually represents

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as a kind of crucible where different programs, philosophies, and interests are melted down into a mild broth of humanitarian hope. From the Colonel, then, Manuel learns "prudence, rigor, discipline." And from Manuel the Colonel learns . . . that Communists are willing to take lessons from the bourgeoisie, even from a police chief. And this really sums up the whole *mystique* of the "strange fraternity." The bourgeois element in the people's front acquires a tolerance for the ideas of the masses; but the masses learn to act like the bourgeois, and thus to act in their interests.

So, finally, Malraux has thrown off the death obsession—at the expense of the Anarchists!—and there emerges as the symbol of regeneration, Manuel, the automatic Communist. Perhaps it is intended that Garcia, so fertile in rationalizations, should complement Manuel, as the super-ego complements the ego. And it is true that Garcia dissociates himself from the Communists, professing to a slight distaste for their savage party and doctrinal pieties. But about the *content* of these pieties, the social and ethical implications, he raises no questions at all. And on his own particular level, he is the chief apologist for activism, the leading excommunicator of intellectuals. Like those unofficial Stalinist oracles in real life who would replace orthodox polemics with, say, semantics, he merely substitutes the psychological mode for the political mode; and armed with his private system of *goûts,* his invidious cults of sacrifice, dissidence, *etc.,* he manages quite as well as the politicians to snare all the fish that are swimming in the wrong direction. Garcia thus achieves the dignity of a social type, short-lived, no doubt, but authentic enough while it lasts—the type of liberal Comintern lobbyist thrown up by the stooge politics of people's-frontism.

L'Espoir, too, comes under that head.

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ART CHRONICLE:

Some Personal Letters to American Artists Recently Exhibiting in New York

To the American Abstract Artists, American Fine Arts Galleries:

I know well the obstacles that have been surmounted in the shaping of this exhibition. Afterwards it will be difficult to determine the extent of success or failure; yet even beforehand it is easy to line up your opponents. I could approximate, before it is written, the article each critic will print upon your work. Some of those who were indifferent will begin to see what you are driving at. The definitely hostile will grow more violent. Others will find themselves unable to write at all.

The strongest public opposition will issue, as always, from the large troupe of perpetual gallery-visitors. Like other members of established society, they have become categorically opposed to anything unaccustomed; and the traditions you seek to perpetuate surely require a reorientation. Unable to shake away preconceived notions of what a 'work of art' should be, many visitors will continue to suspect that you are artfully concealing representational objects. But this large-scale opposition no longer counts at all. Only a few of the newspaper columnists still give it public utterance.

Another group—and one which should know better—presents a more formidable barrier to recognition. For it contains artists, teachers, critics. The natural function of these should be to lead the public; in America the critics merely confuse and hold the public back. Many of them are of course governed by fear, not merely the conventional bourgeois fear that hungers for conformity with the past, but the more definite fear that an understanding of the abstract processes might suggest that their own years of effort had been misdirected. They have for a century been evolving ingenious arguments to defeat your predecessors in every art-form. And now in turn they will pronounce your pictures 'dead' (as though the life in a work of art were derived from the liveliness of its subject-matter); that they are imitative (as though all aesthetic innovators had not been likewise dependent on their precursors); that they are purely emotional; that they are not emotional enough; that they are academic; that they are governed by no laws of any kind.

And you must not overlook an opposition that will oppose you on political grounds, that will satirize you as 'escapists' who work in a

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vacuum. They will find in your work no visible connection with the causes of social justice, adding that illustrative propaganda is a natural function of art, that much past culture was essentially propagandist. Surely this reasoning does not delve very far into the esthetic processes. It ignores the long periods before the art-currents of the past had developed, before they were capable of supporting heavy propagandist over-meanings; it overlooks the slow centuries of complete or semi-abstract efforts toward realization, the Greek urn-decorations, the Byzantine mosaics, etc. And even the later direct propaganda—humanistic, religious, or social—was the exception; most of it moreover (Fra Angelico, Daumier) will tend to look old-fashioned as it becomes removed by time. The most enduring masters present the opposite approach Their full weight is thrown into the plastic language, and, being men of their epochs, they could bring to their task only the available contemporary symbols, which they shaped to their individually expressive ends.

You have had your troubles in freeing yourselves from the accepted accessories. Many of you still hang on to representation by the eyelids; bottles, pipes, faces protrude from certain corners. And, in your desire to become grounded in the new tradition, a number of you hide your voices so stiffly behind alien fabrics that no tone can emerge at all. Yet this is as it should be; it is only the second time that you have had mass-connection with an audience. Any talent must close for years upon the problems of expression before the signal can be given for independent advances, before it can exude a genuine distinction of style.

The derogatory charges of European imitation that you will have to face present a purely modern and journalistic brand of criticism. In no other period was the artist expected to appear, fully-armed, as by spontaneous combustion. Can it be imagined that Raphael was derided for imitating Perugino? Dürer, Rubens, or Poussin for incorporating the art of Italy into their own? On the contrary, it is natural and beneficial that you should assimilate at the start whatever implements are available. However, there is no need for you to make these answers to the charge at all. Your exhibition-walls resound with a native clarity and color-sense that speaks strongly of America. The rest will follow if there is enthusiasm and patience.

This exhibition can teach many things. In our present environment, so full of divergent currents, only discipline and restriction can build up a lasting flexibility. You saw how the artists of the world had gone completely awry with their elaborate campaigns to conquer the visible world (Impressionism), the unconscious world (Surrealism), the political world (Propagandism), the complex texture of a new locality (American Scene). Whereas the shapes themselves,—their weight and position and movement,—that seemingly unimportant infantry with whom the masters of the past in every climate were accustomed to conquer and maintain their traditions for centuries on end, had been left half-trained and fainting at their tasks. I cannot foresee what your group may be pro-

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ducing in a decade. But in the meantime you qualify as the sole organization in America that is dedicated to the hewing out of an authentic and appropriate cultural expression.

To Charles Demuth, Whitney Museum:

There are many who regret that you are not here to see this exhibition. You would be surprised yourself, perhaps, at the poise and monumentality that your work retains, even from as far back as 1913. To many who had previously known your pictures through isolated examples, the present complete display comes as a revelation. There are inherent native qualties here, and a structural fabric that can support them. Your stature increased, while much that was more ambitious has been forgotten in the meantime.

It may have been for the best that, like Juan Gris, you did not live through the disturbing depression cycle. For you are free to go down among recent American painters as the only one who knew to the end what you were doing. There is no strain, your accent was never forced; everything in this exhibition holds within its limits to the wall. Perhaps you knew that it would be like this, but you could hardly have foreseen that for a long time you would be the only one. It may have been the disease of your body,—the fact that you always knew when your work must cease—which creates the sense of completeness.

During your life-time your work was referred to as cold. You were indeed always aloof. The passion for realism inherent in America never touched you. Your pictures are not lively, but they live with an internal vitality that will endure. You were fortunate in your contact with the European structural renaissance at an early date. By 1912 your aesthetic accent was already established. The electric line, the very personal manipulation of shape and contour, your peculiar secret of letting the picture breathe through its unpainted areas, were there before the War. Of course there were pitfalls. You ran into difficulties when you tried to fuse abstraction with landscape and house-forms, the only time when there is a disturbing divergence of spirit. And you did not imbibe the later teachings of abstraction, your color does not completely absorb the form. But, on the other hand, you were never impeded by Marin's impressionist hang-over. You were always an architect within the canvas boundary, with a passion for exhausting every means whereby the parts might be welded together. Your gifts are most congenial to still-life; there, where the shapes are more readily and simply defined the full emotional gamut lies securely at rest.

Influences are difficult to trace throughout your work; only occasionally will the echo of an early American flower-painting protrude or (as in "Mme. Delaunois") of Constantin Guys. Neither has your own influence been wide, but in depth it can be incalculable. To enter these

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exhibition-rooms is to discover a world where everything is digested and understood. There are no 'cocktails', no quickly-shaken mixtures of alien styles,—a trend that has become the bane of American art. And the coldness that was once attributed to you seems to have vanished now. Few of the enduring monuments from any period have been ingratiating at the start. The supreme achievements often "refuse" the spectator and he is forced to try again. So it is that when your world is finally broken into, there is no trace of vulgarity, for there had never been disturbing inducements to attract the casual eye. You present the quality we need most today if we can withstand the shocks with which the artist is being continually bombarded.

To Georgia O'Keeffe, An American Place:

I could have foretold, Miss O'Keeffe, that this would happen to you. If you had asked me years ago I could have told you; and now I will tell it all even though you do not ask me.

You were deluded from the beginning, Miss O'Keeffe. Legend has it that you emerged as a school-teacher from Texas. Forbes Watson has referred in *The Arts* to later legendary times "when Miss Georgia O'Keeffe was the prettiest young lady student at the League." You next appeared as a full-fledged painter, and among dangerous surroundings. The subject-matter in your first pictures—the gigantic flowers—was arresting to begin with; but from the start your limitations were plain. You could ingratiate with an image, but the art of painting itself, the necessary technical equipment, did not come naturally to your fingers. This could have been overcome, as many great artists have overcome it, had you only understood. But you had been deluded. You felt that everything you touched was sensational and "artistic," whereas in reality there was only the sign-painter's slimy technique. Influential people, who are usually insensitive to inner distinction, said that your work was good; they told others it was good; and the future was yours.

Yet how soon you were to exhaust your repertoire! Your flower-pictures grew tiresome; even the sexual over-meanings became sticky and dull. I can remember the brief cheer that arose from your group when you painted a sky-scraper by night. You further expanded your subject-matter to include bones, barns, and scenery in the West. And all the time your lack of technical equipment and your lack of taste lay naked and raw.

During the last year you have tried to loosen your technique. But only a sure foundation can permit flexibility. You had ignored the aesthetic structure itself while fiddling around with the eaves. Your forms could not expect to achieve realization. They blow into gas at the high-lights, like the exhibits in a summer "art-colony." Only the academic critics can now applaud you, and the columnists who write for

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housewives; they believe correctly that they have found a celebrated modern painter who has joined their ranks at last.

To Peter Blume, Julien Levy Gallery (one picture exhibition):

I have not seen the *Eternal City,* and that is not entirely necessary. I can see it all from where I sit with the aid of a colored photograph. I know your work of old, and its expressive scope was never hard to fathom. This time your subject-matter, your properties, have changed with your sojourn abroad. What is most important you now talk a language that the critics can understand and write about; therefore your picture has received astonishingly favorable publicity, from the *New Yorker* ("swell") to the *Nation* ("the outstanding painting of the year.") Perhaps you have noticed that the praise has come from directions that are a trifle shaky on aesthetic grounds; and there are obvious reasons why the *Against War and Fascism* members could hardly have passed you by without applause. You have made other new gestures that attracted praise; you have depicted ruins, columns, foliage, clouds, and a suspicion of Christ in the background, all of which the public is accustomed to regard as the natural properties of art. And there is a satirical overtone that no one can miss. Furthermore, you have worked slowly and carefully on a smooth gesso panel, which turns neatness into child's-play. You never slip a brush-stroke across a boundary on to the adjacent object; and thus you have brought down cries of technical perfection.

Dali is another who has been lauded as a consummate technician. It might be rewarding to qualify a little the meaning of the word technique. True, neither of you is sloppy and does not spill over the edges (your works might live more freely if you occasionally would). But what of the more searching aspects of technical dexterity, that can bring life through the very impact of the artist's touch? And if you paint in chiaroscuro there should be, it seems, a technical equipment capable of patterning and controlling the areas of light and dark. The plastic language requires a broader definition of 'technique' for sustenance than the mere ability to follow boundary-lines on a smooth gesso-panel.

Behind your painting there lurks a deeper irony than the green face of Mussolini on a jumping-jack. You have lived in Italy, and you have appreciated the gruesomeness of fascist dictatorship. Yet your painting falls completely into the mesh it excoriates. Fascism delights in the pictorial conceptions that do no violence to what has always been. Fascism fears the genuine contemporary spirit, it will serve up what has always been served. It will give the people an art that resembles superficially such art as has been safely tucked into the museums. Here you have given us a picture that "looks like" the Quattrocento; Hitler might give you a fat prize at the Munich *Kunstpalast* if you would only substitute

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the spirit of the New Reich coming out of the box for the goggle-eyed caricature of his friend.

The painting "looks like" the Quattrocento, but one will search in vain for an internal vitality such as the Italian masters produced throughout their struggle with the shapes of their new expression. You have found no need for any attack in this direction. You have half-digested the old aesthetic devices, and that is all you think necessary. It is not strange, therefore, that your painting should be plastically dumb; that what it says could have been put more succinctly into a written paragraph. Perhaps it was your aim to express the essence of the fascist corpse; but this is being done as blatantly today in every academy in the world.

GEORGE L. K. MORRIS

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BOOKS

ARCHITECT'S UTOPIA

ARCHITECTURE AND MODERN LIFE. *By Baker Brownell and Frank Lloyd Wright. Harper & Bros.* $4.00.

Frank Lloyd Wright believes that only "organic architecture" or primitive Christianity—"Jesus, the gentle anarchist"—can solve the crisis. This was also the theme of his earlier book, *The Disappearing City,* written in the depths of the depression. If we forget the undergraduate poetizing of the great architect, now seventy years old ("the earth is prostrate, prostitute to the sun"), and his no less profound philosophizing ("what, then, is life?"), and if we strip his argument of the grand, neo-Biblical and neo-Whitmanesque theogonic jargon of "integral," "organic" and the man "individual," we come at last to a familiar doctrine of innocence and original sin and a plan of redemption by rural housing. According to Wright (and this is developed in detail by Brownell) a primitive state of democratic individualism in the Eden of the small towns and the farms was perverted by the cities. A privileged class arose which did not know how to administer its wealth in the common interest; and what remained of the native culture was corrupted by the immigrants. But by an internal law that regulates the fortunes of mankind, swinging life back to its healthy starting-point when it has gone too far toward decay, salvation comes through the evil itself. As the city grows, it is choked by its own traffic and reawakens the nomadic instincts of man. Its own requirements of efficiency gradually bring about decentralization. And the insecurity of life in the city forces people back to the soil where their living depends on themselves alone and a healthy individualism can thrive. In the Broadacre City, already designed by Wright in his earlier book, the urban refugee will have his acre of ground on which to grow some vegetables; he will work several days a week in a factory some miles away, accessible in his second-hand Ford; the cash income will supplement the garden; and through these combined labors he will enjoy a balanced life in nature. The new integrity of the individual will bring about the end of speculation and commercial standards.

The deurbanizing of life, the fusion of city and country on a high productive level, is an ideal shared by socialists and anarchists. But when presented as in Wright's books as an immediate solution of the crisis, it takes on another sense. It is the plan of Ford and Swope, a scheme of permanent subsistence farming with a corvée of worksharing in the distant mill, of scattered national company villages under a reduced living standard. The homes of Broadacre City may be of the most recent

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and efficient materials; they may be designed by the ablest architects—"integrated" and "organic" as Wright assures us they will be; but all these are perfectly consistent with physical and spiritual decay. Social well-being is not simply an architectural problem. A prison may be a work of art and a triumph of ingenuity. The economic conditions that determine freedom and a decent living are largely ignored by Wright. He foresees, in fact, the poverty of these new feudal settlements when he provides that the worker set up his own factory-made house, part by part, according to his means, beginning with a toilet and kitchen, and adding other rooms as he earns the means by his labor in the factory. His indifference to property relations and the state, his admission of private industry and second-hand Fords in this idyllic world of amphibian labor, betray its reactionary character. Already under the dictatorship of Napoleon III, the state farms, partly inspired by the old Utopias, were the official solution of unemployment. The democratic Wright may attack rent and profit and interest, but apart from some passing reference to the single-tax he avoids the question of class and power.

The outlines of Wright's new society are left unclear; they are like the content of his godless religion for which he specifies a church in Broadacre City. After all, he is an architect telling you what a fine home he can build you in the country; it is not his business to discuss economics and class relations. But in the chapters by his collaborator, Brownell, who has more to say about technology, economics and culture (although the consequences are not faced in any field), the reactionary side of this shabby, streamlined Utopia becomes more evident.

The core of his argument is the critique of bourgeois society made over a hundred years ago by both the right and the left and repeated since, that it destroys idyllic values, dehumanizes man, disperses his interests and activity and subjects him to the machine. But following the right, he opposes to it the ideal of a self-sufficient agrarian culture on the Borsodi plan, with its elaborate household industry. By converting the middle class—the real subject of his anxiety—into a conservative peasantry, he hopes to restore their "human integrity." There is little direct reference to exploitation and war and the everyday brutalities of class power; where he has to deal with the clash of interests, his thought becomes blurred or allegorical. The historical movements of our time are transposed into conflicts between shadowy principles. The great and primary struggle is between "relativism" and "absolutism": an inherent tendency toward freedom and creativeness (relativity) meets an opposite inherent tendency toward "absolutism." Beside this "primarily intellectual conflict" there are three lesser ones: Urbanism vs. Agrarianism, Security vs. Opportunity, Specialization vs. Integrity, the latter two being individual, not social, problems. Ignorant of socialist theory, of which he has acquired some elements of the vocabulary, he caricatures socialist ideas in a half-baked manner. He is against socialism because it is necessarily centralized and urban, surrendering freedom for security, but also because it is "essentially insecure, unstable, destructive of human values of life." He

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can speak in the same work of the economic causes of crises, but also of the decay of western Europe and the economic disasters of the United States as "natural functions of the overgrown urbanism and cosmopolitanism of these times." He cannot explain why security should decline as productive power increases; "the disorganization of personal life" is not the cause, as he thinks, but only an effect.

His own agrarian solution involves a similar indifference to economic facts. The interdependence of agriculture and industry, of production and the market, is nowhere analyzed and the obvious practical objections remain unanswered. He does not ask: what will be the effect of such a return to the soil and the self-sufficiency he advocates on the millions of farmers (with their tenants and laborers) who depend on cash crops and already find their market dwindling? or the effect of the lower income of the semi-industrial workers on the same agricultural market? He recommends a revival of household industry with modern machines as an essential part of the new agrarianism. But how can the farmer who grows crops only for himself afford this elaborate plant for producing his own household goods?

Characteristically enough, Brownell approves the trend toward industrial decentralization, not seeing that it coincides with an even greater concentration of ownership and a greater poverty of the masses. He innocently looks forward to a broader distribution of productive property as one of the results of this trend; but in the name of a mysterious concept of balance he would preserve centralized private control of some industries and a decentralized private ownership of others. Although the self-sufficiency of the farms in his ideal America is to rest upon the use of machines, he deplores the drift of the farm youth to the cities, which is due precisely to the mechanizing of agriculture.

His whole approach is based on the pathetic polarities of stability and movement, order and restlessness, the land and the city, formulated by the folk-loving, but anti-democratic, romantic reaction at the beginning of the nineteenth century. He has inherited its stock antitheses of security and insecurity, the whole and the fragment, the organic and the inorganic; and added like his predecessors other categories appropriate to the politics and science of the moment. There are indeed personal nuances, but in the muddled form of the whole, with its eclectic hyphenation of doctrines, they are as insignificant as the lyrical delicacies of the more learned Nazis. Like the religious and feudal reactionaries of the last century and their fascist successors, Brownell wants a "balanced" and an "integral" society. But balance, he admits, is not good in all fields. In population, for example, a homogeneous racial and national stock is preferable to a "balance of stocks." Nevertheless, he finds "an integrated life" only in the South. And as he goes on to specify the ideals of his "natural" agrarian culture, he begins to resemble the fascists to a hair. He attacks the declining birth-rate and the increasing longevity. The old are uncreative and useless; big families, especially big rural families, with plenty of young men, are needed to effect the balance and the integration.

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And these big families must produce in their domestic factories an American "folk art and a folk religion and even a folk education" to end the cultural crisis. Brownell shares the Nazi enthusiasm and vagueness about the folk as a classless primordial "natural" mass which he opposes to the landless immigrants with their "unnatural" and un-American urban interests. "Surely one of the main influences toward a more integrated life and culture is the nature of the American people. They are not suited to urban lives and extreme specialization. The agrarian tradition is deeply in them." But strangely enough jazz music in its dynamic character becomes for him an American folk product, although in his yearning for repose he has criticized this dynamism as a foreign and urban perversion.

The contradictions and naivetés of this book are so numerous that the informed reader can have little confidence in the authors. He is struck again and again by the contrast between their reverence for technique and science and their complete failure to analyze the social mechanism they have in mind and the means for realizing their goals. They are obsessed by modern life as an expression of something peculiar to the moment, but are wholly unable to make an historical explanation. The idea that society is known through its reflections permits a crude analogical thinking and the flattest impressionist substitutes for a rounded historical study. The pages devoted by Wright to architectural style are no better; he says little that is precise about the forms of contemporary building, and his survey of past architecture is a grotesque parody of the views of the 1880s, a home-made affair based on old readings and the artistic propaganda of the pioneers of the modern movement. All architecture after the fourteenth century is regarded as decadent, and post-mediaeval painting as merely photographic.

The social imagination of Wright should not be classed with that of the great Utopians whom he seems to resemble. Their energy, their passion for justice and their constructive fantasy were of another and higher order and embodied the most advanced insights of their time. The thought of Wright, on the other hand, is improvised, vagrant and personal at a moment when the social values and relations he expounds have already long been the subject of critical analysis and scientific formulation. He is not in the direct line of the Utopians, but his social criticism as an architect is in many ways characteristic of modern architectual prophecy and has its European parallels, though addressed to an American middle class. During the last fifty years the literature of building has acquired a distinctive reformist and prophetic tone. The architects demand a new style to fit a new civilization, or if the civilization has become problematic, they propose a new architecture to reform it. In either case, the architect, unlike the poet or the painter, is a practical critic of affairs. Even his aesthetic programs are permeated with the language of efficiency, and underneath his ideals of simplicity and a flexible order we can detect the emulation of the engineer. As a technician who must design for a widening market, he can foresee endless

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material possibilities of his art, and by the existing standards he can judge the wretchedness of the average home. The whole land cries out to be rebuilt, while he himself, inventive and energetic, remains unemployed. But his social insight is limited by his professional sphere; in general, the architect knows the people whom he serves mainly in terms of their resources and their tastes. Their economic role, their active relation to other classes, escape him. His certainty that architecture is a mirror of society does not permit him to grasp the social structure. The correspondences of architecture and "life" by which he hopes to confirm the historic necessity of his new style, these are largely on the surface, reflections of reflections: architecture, for Wright, is "a spirit of the spirit of man." Hence Le Corbusier could wonder how such pillars of efficiency and honor as the bankers tolerated the sham façades of their banks; he offered to protect them from revolution by designing hygienically superior workers' homes. Today, Wright returning from Russia finds it hard "to be reconciled to the delays Russia is experiencing no matter how cheerfully in getting the architecture characteristic of her new life and freedom." But he explains the "falsity" of the current bureaucratic classicism of the public buildings by Stalin's eagerness to please the people who want the luxuries once enjoyed by their masters. "If Stalin is betraying the revolution, then I say he is betraying it into the hands of the Russian people" (*Architectural Record,* Oct. 1937).

This blindness to the facts of social and economic power makes possible the visionary confidence with which architects like Wright correct society on the drawing-board. Accustomed to designing plans, which others will carry out and for which the means of realization already exist, they assume for themselves the same role or division of labor in the work of social change. The conditions which inspired their architectural inventiveness are more like those which preside over reforms than over revolution. Through their designs they have effected the almost daily transformation of the cities, and when society has to be rebuilt, their self-assurance as prophetic forces is strengthened by the current demands for housing and public works as the only measures against ruin. Their reformist sentiments are echoed by the architectural metaphors of planning, construction, foundations, bases and frameworks in the language of economic and social reform. Advanced architects who have only contempt for the grandiose, unrealistic projects of academic architectural competitions, relapse into social planning of the same vastness and practical insignificance. They are subject especially to the illusion that because they are designing for a larger and larger mass of people they are directly furthering democracy through their work; Mumford, for example, supposed that the use of the same kind of electric bulb by the rich and the poor was a sign of the inherent democratic effects of modern technology. The existence of fascism is the brutal answer to such fantasies.

To the degree that the crisis is judged psychologically as the result of "restlessness" and is neurotically laid to a "faulty environment" or to

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mistakes of the past, the architectural utopia of Wright, the specialist in new environments, must seem really convincing to those from whom the economic reality is hidden. Around the private middle-class dwelling cluster such strong and deep memories of security that the restoration of the home appears in itself a radical social cure. Throughout his books Wright insists that architecture is the art which gives man a sense of stability in an unstable world, and that of all styles of building the modern is the most "organic." "The old is chaos, restlessness"; the new, "integral, organic, is order, repose," he writes,—like the modern mystics of the state and church. In his survey of modern architecture—otherwise so meagre—Wright tells in detail how he built the Imperial Hotel of Tokyo on marshy ground, and how this building alone withstood the earthquake of 1923. But social earthquakes are not circumvented by cantilevers and light partitions.

In spite of the exaggerations and errors of Wright in giving architecture an independent role in shaping social life, the experience of his profession has a vital bearing on socialism. But it is just this bearing that Wright and Brownell, as spokesmen for the middle class, ignore. They have failed to recognize—what must be apparent on a little reflection—that the progress of architecture to-day depends not only on large-scale planning and production, but also on the continuity of this production and on a rising living standard of the whole mass of the people—conditions irreconciliable with private control of industry. It is only when all three conditions are present that the architect can experiment freely and control the multiplicity of factors which now enter invariably into his art. Monopoly capitalism and its political regimes also plan on a large scale, within certain limits, but they are fatally tied to crises and war and declining standards of life (not to mention political and cultural repression) which limit the architect at every point. The masses cannot afford good homes and the intervention of the capitalist state in housing is tentative and even reactionary, since it helps to perpetuate lower standards and supports the familiar speculative swindles. Moreover, even under more prosperous conditions, the great mass of architects have no chance for original artistic creation; they are salaried workers submerged in a capitalist office, with little possibility of self-development. The architect cannot be indifferent to these as merely economic and material factors inferior to creative problems. The latter are not posed unless the architect can really build, and the quality of the solutions depends in part on the freedom of the architect in realizing his designs. In our day the best architects have built very little during the last eight years, at a time when the need of new construction was universally admitted. Even the slight upswing just experienced has already subsided and architects face a desperate future. A return to the soil, far from stimulating architecture, can only depress it further.

MEYER SCHAPIRO

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HARD HISTORY

LIFE ALONG THE PASSAIC RIVER. *By William Carlos Williams. New Directions.* $1.75.

In this collection of nineteen short stories not one imitates in any way the accepted patetrns of the genre. The directness of this writer's approach to his material excludes its subjection to the researches of plot and objective form. What Williams tells us is much too close to him to lend itself to the alienation of design; none of his perceptions can be communicated through the agency of invented equivalents. The phenomena he observes and their meanings are so intimately involved with each other, the cohabitation of language and object is so harmonious, that formal means of expression would not only be superfluous but might actually nullify the incentive to creation. These notations in a doctor's notebook, these fragments salvaged from grime and squalor, these insights gained during the routines of humble labor—such would only be given the lie by the professional mannerisms of authorship, its pomposities and braggadocio. Where usually a writer takes the attitude of an impresario to his themes, calculating each entrance and each exit, Williams will begin or end his story as the spirit moves him; pausing to face his reader, he will take him into his confidence and speak his mind without recourse to stratagems of ingratiation. Elliptical in some passages and naturalistic in others, Williams is perfectly conscious of writing, but hostile to "literature." Out of "a straight impulse, without borrowing, without lie, or complaint" he puts down on paper that which stirs him. His subjects are few and often minute, their scope is sharply circumscribed by his personal experience and by his voluntary seclusion within the local and immediate, he repeats himself frequently—yet these stories are exceptional for their authenticity and told not to provoke but to record. It it pain which is the source of values here. The dread of annihilation is ever present—"Christ, Christ! . . . How can a man live in the face of this daily uncertainty? How can a man not go mad with grief, with apprehension?" No grand conceits, no gratuitous excitements, no melodrama. There is no doing away with the staples of existence; no gallivanting on the banks of the Passaic River.

For what could be more dismal than life in these small industrial towns of New Jersey? The mills are worked by immigrant laborers, and their youngsters are "all over the city as soon as they can walk and say, Paper!" The doctor visits these deracinated households, often angry at himself because of the tenderness in him that reaches out to these people, quite as often resigned to doing his job, to immersing himself in the finalities of human life. "To me," he writes, "it is a hard, barren life, where I am alone and unmolested (work as I do in thick of it) though in constant danger lest some slip send me to perdition but which,

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being covetous not at all, I enjoy for the seclusion and primitive air of it. But that is all-unless I must add an attraction in all the inanimate associations of my youth, shapes, foliage, trees to which I am used—and a love of place and the characteristics of place—good or bad, rich or poor."

The little girl, both of whose tonsils are covered with membrane, fights furiously to keep him from knowing her secret. Another one, a lank-haired girl of fifteen, is a "powerful little animal" upon whom you can stumble on the roof, behind the stairs "any time at all." A dozen wise guys are on her trail. Cured of her pimples, how will this tenacious creature ever slash her way to the bliss recited on the radio? "The pure products of America go crazy," Williams once wrote in a poem. And these stories are familiar images of the same, released by that active faculty of sympathy which Henry James prized above all else in the equipment of an artist. But this writer has no hankering for consistent explanations, for the constancy of reason; he seldom permits himself to ask why. "What are you going to do with a guy like that. Or why want to do anything with him. *Except not miss him.*" This last is the point. He is content with grasping the fact, with creating a phenomenology; but the relations, social and historic, that might unify these facts and significate them on a plane beyond sensation or nostalgia he has no mind for. And this absence of what one might call, in his terms, ideological presumptuousness, while admirable in its stoicism, also constitutes his defeat. However much of value there is in these facts of "hard history" and in the scrupulous gathering of their detail, the larger implications are systematically neglected. Thought is proscribed as anti-esthetic. Habitually confined to the suggestive and purely descriptive, this prose nevertheless holds within iself some of the raw elements of a materialist consciousness.

But Williams does think about America, if only to sketch it in psychic outline. He is under the spell of its *mystique* and strains to encompass it in a vision. This need in him provides a contrast and relief to the phenomenological principle informing his work; and much of his charm flows from the interaction of his precise facts with his American mysticism. In his novel, *White Mule,* the fusion of these two qualities allowed a visible direction to emerge. "What then is it like, America?" asks Fräulein Von J. in "The Venus" (which seems to me the best story in the book). This German girl is a genuine post-war object. She has a genius for formulating the most complex modern problems in the simplest terms. The daughter of a general, she comes to Italy to become a nun. But perhaps America—she questions the American, Evans, who carries a flint arrowhead in his pocket—could prove a satisfactory alternative to the Church? Evans speaks of the old pioneer houses of his ancestors, and of that "early phase" of America whose peculiar significance has been forgotten or misunderstood. The German girl holds the arrowhead in her hand, feeling its point and edge. "It must be even more lonesome and frightening in America than in Germany," she finally said. The story

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recalls to us the Williams of *In the American Grain*, a writer ravaged by this hemisphere's occult aboriginal past. In some ways Dr. Williams is really a medicine-man.

PHILIP RAHV

CAPITALISM, AMERICAN STYLE

AMERICA'S SIXTY FAMILIES. *By Ferdinand Lundberg. Vanguard Press.* $3.75.

THE FOLKLORE OF CAPITALISM. *By Thurman W. Arnold. Yale University Press.* $3.00.

The interest and importance of a book are not, of course, confined to the will of the author, the logic of his argument, or the abstract beauties of his style. A book is an instrument of communication, a public object. Once launched, the author has no exclusive claim to the rudder. The book is what it does; the sea decides.

That is why it is always relevant to enquire into what happens to books; who likes them and why; and how they are used. Both *The Folklore of Capitalism* and *America's Sixty Families* are selling well, unusually well for books which are expensive and on serious subjects. *The Folklore of Capitalism* is considerably ahead. Both received, and are receiving, extensive critical notice. But there has been a notable difference between the receptions given to the two.

There has been scarcely a breach in the extravagant praise heaped upon *The Folklore of Capitalism*. The daily critic of the New York *Times* gave it two of his columns—an act seldom precedented. Alfred M. Bingham ventured a prediction: "It is quite possible that a hundred years from now this book of Professor Arnold's and his previous *Symbols of Government*, will be as much revered as we now revere Darwin's *Origin of Species*." *The New Republic* was no less enthusiastic in its adjectives and its comparisons: "I go the whole hog for *The Folklore of Capitalism*. Bluntly, I think it's a great book. . . . Personally, I think that Mr. Arnold has his fingers on something miles ahead of Marx—in maturity, acceptability, and, especially, in usefulness." I am told that Professor Arnold's New Deal colleagues (he is himself an ardent and busy New Dealer) come into meetings with the book under their arms, like 16th Century statesmen with *The Prince*. Most interesting of all, there has been virtually no attack from the camp of the Tories, the avowed targets of Arnold's shafts.

America's Sixty Families has had a normal quota of praise. But few unconditioned superlatives; and no comparisons to Darwin or Marx. "Provocative," "stimulating," "important,"—the usual non-committal

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tags from timid reviewers not yet quite sure how the land lies. Then, a week or two after the reviews, a barrage from the heavy guns, still continuing. Into the news columns, in the issues of *Editor and Publisher*, ancient editors of the *Times* and modern experts testify to Lundberg's "inaccuracies." The economists begin to prove that he does not understand the intricacies of interlocking directorates, that his method for calculating the size of fortunes is against all the canons. The Duponts have already brought suit for libel.

There is no mystery to this difference in welcome. Arnold's book, *in spite of* his tweedy avowals of a very revolutionary point of view indeed, is simply a fancy coating for things as they are, with a bitter and genuinely reactionary kernel. Lundberg's book, *in spite of* the mild and naive reformism of his occasional positive suggestions, is an array of explosive facts which, if they should penetrate the consciousness of the masses, are capable of shattering the fabric of things as they are.

I do not mean that *The Folklore of Capitalism* is an altogether worthless book. It successfully popularizes a number of ideas which, though not new, remain important; and it adds fresh insights and applications. Professor Arnold's central thesis is sufficiently familiar: All social organizations develop a complicated folklore or mythology. The logical content of this mythology is always subordinate to the ability of its key symbols to excite attitudes of loyalty. As conditions change, the relevance of older mythologies to contemporary social forces and problems becomes increasingly distant, until they act more and more heavily as brakes upon the institutional adjustments required for the solution of current problems. Finally, when new social organizations win dominant place, the new mythologies propagated by these new organizations take the place of the old in the popular mind.

Proceeding from this thesis, Arnold analyzes what he claims to be the reigning mythology in this country: a mythology in which business men are gods, the government Satan, and governmental "interference" the first of the Capital Sins. He does his best job on "The Ritual of Corporate Reorganization—in which is explained the doctrine of vicarious atonement through which the debts of an industrial organization are forgiven." We may in general thank him for reminding us once again and so emphatically that no political doctrine can ever make its way into men's minds without the warming gift of a satisfying symbolism.

It seems unkind to be harsh about this book, whose good-natured quips are so uniformly directed against Tories and the other goblins in Professor Arnold's own mythology. However, consider:

In enthusiasm for his thesis, Arnold in actuality attacks scientific method in general. For example: "Thirty years ago medical men were still fighting for principle. . . . Today . . . medicine has been taken over by men of skill rather than men of principle. . . . There is little left in medicine for thinking men to debate." As if there were any science whatever apart from "principle"—i.e., generalities, laws!

Above all does Arnold make fun of principles in politics—prin-

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ciples, for him, are of course all merely mythological items, are and *ought to be*. Politics is therefore reduced by Arnold to demagogy: and, again, not merely is politics as now practised demagogy, but *it should be so*—any other than demagogic politics is bad politics. This is accompanied by a really vicious attack on democracy, under the pretense that democracy is no longer a "creed" but has become "accepted as a political fact." "Thus has democracy changed . . . to a recognition that every institution must keep the faith and loyalty of its members . . . the art of government consists in the technique of achieving willing popular acceptance. . . . " According to this conception, as Arnold himself suggests, the plebiscitary methods of the authoritarian dictatorships are the apotheosis of realistic democracy. Not surprisingly, therefore, Hitler and Stalin (almost always coupled) are mentioned invariably in favorable contexts. For Professor Arnold, the victory of the Russian Revolution is the triumph of a sound man of common sense over the foolish dreamers who led October: "The seeds of the Russian Revolution were sown by learned theoretical idealists. . . . These men, during the dark days of the Czar, were occupied in writing dull and complicated books. . . . In the first part of the revolution men who had not written learned treatises had difficulty in getting high positions in the new regime. In the course of time the learning which had occupied the revolutionists finally gave way to the dictatorship of a practical politician."

Still more. Only once does Arnold suggest the historical basis for the rise of a new mythology: "Probably the only way in which mythologies actually change is through the rise to power of a new class whose traditional heroes are of a different mold." And what class is now rising? "Today we can observe the rise of a class of engineers, salesmen, minor executives, and social workers. . . ." How will this class assert dominance? "A new creed . . . is about to be born. . . . It is represented vaguely by the personality of Roosevelt who has become the symbol for a political attitude. . . . In Europe the rise of personalities to express national aspirations which older institutions could not fulfil has taken the same course. . . . "

In summation, then, of what lurks beneath the stone of this New Dealism: Against science; for myths and the religion of the blood; against democracy; for demagogy and "efficiency"; power for the middle classes, achieved through a Leader. Yes, to recall the words of *The New Republic*: "miles ahead of Marx."*

After lifting such skirts, it is refreshing to turn to *America's Sixty Families*. Nine-tenths of Lundberg's book consists of the statement, coordination, and documentation of facts: the facts about twentieth cen-

* I am not crying wolf. Arnold is not a Fascist. But his ideological tendencies, transferred against a background of deeper social crisis, are the material for exploitation by the harsher and more single-minded "realists" of Fascism. With sufficient space, I could match every one of Arnold's positive statements, phrase for phrase and often word for word, with selections from the Fascist ideologists or from Sorel, Bergson, Spengler, and their other cultural forebears.

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tury United States. Here is your true antidote for the sugar of mythologies. The mass and impact of these facts are overwhelming. They are not new or unknown facts—indeed, among so many, drawn often from such obscure corners, the accusers may be correct in finding a number in error (which would make not the slightest difference to the book taken as a whole). What Lundberg has done is to assemble the facts, to form and direct them.

There are, then, no "classes" in the United States? Read, then, about these mighty families, richer and more powerful than any monarch in history, their personal lives more wildly lavish than the maddest dreams of falling Rome. The government is, you say, of, by and for the people? Read, then, not an abstract theory of the state, but the names, dates and places in the story of how these dynasties control every man and act of the government. But the great fortunes perform an indispensable social function in making possible science, charity, education? Read the detailed story of the Foundations and Endowments; note their actual social role.

That war for democracy, which we are asked to fight again in the nearly threatening future? Learn more about that last war, whose war it was and what was done about it. How the members and agents of the great families (names, dates, offices) swept hungrily down upon Washington, gathered in the contracts and orders, replenished and extended with the war funds their mines and factories, how they manipulated the war crisis to double and triple their fortunes and to consolidate their control over every key section of the life and industry of the country.

This book is not in the least mere neo-muckraking. It is journalism, perhaps, but serious flesh and blood and bone journalism: a report, in spite of the Constitution, one of the few ever truly given, on the state of the Union.

It is unfortunate that Lundberg has borrowed the title and some of his conceptions from the "Two Hundred Families" of French Popular Frontism. This exaggerates the individual role of his protagonists, and obscures their integral relationship to the entire social order of which they are a crowning part. It is altogether fantastic that he should believe the political comments he occasionally makes: "The Roosevelt Administration also addressed itself to the . . . problem of neutrality, at least insuring that the American people will, if called upon to participate in the next general war, join the belligerents with their eyes open." "The C.I.O., by organizing workers in heavy industry, was making it impossible for heavy industry and the banks during the next down-swing of the business cycle to institute arbitrarily . . . wholesale lay-offs." Lundberg finished his book before either Roosevelt's Chicago War Address or the current "downswing in the business cycle." How would he write these sentences today?

However, if Lundberg wishes to make a critical re-examination of his own reformist opinions, no better advice could be given him than to re-read thoughtfully his own book. JAMES BURNHAM

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U. S. 1

U.S. 1. *By Muriel Rukeyser. Covici-Friede.* $2.00.

Among the poets born under the World War, Rukeyser, able and ambitious, has assimilated the prosodic taste and social philosophy which were worked out then. They are being worn out now and, for all her straightforward perception, they disable her when she is most ambitious. Her full ability appears in lesser pieces, not in the title poems of *Theory and Flight* and *U.S. 1,* which fall below the high standards they raise up against themselves. The shorter pieces show that in longer poems she may yet do what she wants and, apprehending contemporary fact through immediate documentation, compel instant sense of moral history. The mere attempt is generous to our poetic growth.

Poetry develops intuitive reason not by logical contrivances so much as by immediate sensual association. This is so delightful a process to follow that a poet easily wins readers over to his teaching, if only he be clear about what he has to say and whom he has to address. Given proper audiences, poets are the best agitators; but no one ever has an audience given to him; we must win our own by what we sound and show and teach. All poetry's sound and show is subservient to its teaching even if what it teaches is just what it sounds and shows (i.e. "Pure" Poetry). Where poems are stuttered and blurred, it is because their authors do not know what they are about.

Rukeyser refers to social revolution but tells little of its purpose or its method; yet this is just what people want to learn. Though she says, "Say 'Yes,' people, say 'Yes Yes'," one can hear "the" people answering "Oh yeah?"

Her socialism belongs to the inexperienced school—pre-war. Philosophic experience, necessary to any agitation except that which Debs called "agitation of the atmosphere," is necessary above all to a choice of super-image. For *Theory of Flight* she chose the flying machine because it consummates historic effort and, extending the body through space-time opens up a vaster spread for reason and imagination; and freed men will do all this for a world society; yet the super-image is intractable. Process of flight is not an accurate equivalent to process of emancipation. The overtones of flight imply escapism (Get out from under home and father). The sensations of flight dreamily translate into fornicating. "Yes," she says, "Yes," she says, "Do." Now, rebellious individuals who made the revolution sexy, long have freed capitalist culture from bourgeois decorum. Edna Millay is a sexual saint of the Women's Clubs. All of this may well be good. But it is not the revolved love we expect to enjoy after the abolition of property, and, at its best, is only tangent to proletarian concern. Free sexes will be by-products of a more impersonal

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engineering. The delayed adolescence of this century holds down *Theory of Flight.*

The highroad, *U.S. 1,* is a more tractable super-image, for its overtones imply not escape *from,* but passage *to.* Possibly it is laid down to carry too much traffic which might as well stay at home. We cannot tell; only a detour has been completed; the freight has scarcely got under way. But no more than *Theory of Flight* does *U.S. 1* give people what is good to hear. Its *Book of the Dead* tells how, to cut costs, a corporation killed off carload after carload of workers by filling their lungs full with glass powder which they had them drill dry out of a hydraulic super-conduit, and sold at a good price. This abomination needs to be made memorable. But as not one line of its thousand lines describes the wage system, a goodly number of poetry readers will say, "We haven't the remotest idea why anyone but a dumb cluck worked there. It's a free country, isn't it?" The poem attacks the excrescences of capitalism, not the system's inner nature. Like any good capitalist, Rukeyser condemns bad, shockingly bad, working conditions, but makes no root attack upon everyday exploitation. Capital, the parasite is parricide. Yet not a line of all this condemnation shows how its doom is sealed in the pay envelope.

A limited philosophy limits poetry; political and aesthetic failings have one root. Her genius, knowing that "poetry can extend the document," guided her to the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* and to the *Congressional Record;* but the rewriting does not click. The verse slips from the fulcrum balance through sound and time of parallel or contrasting thoughts which, even in a machine line, constitutes verse. There are many portraits of the worker victims; none strike to the heart, for unscientific socialism, which shares only in the bourgeois' humanity, is more moved by lads without jobs than by men with jobs. How well she can draw when stirred is shown in a separate portrait of an unemployed boy who has his sister give him a short haircut so that he can go out and get some work to do. But she shows no such understanding of the wage system as Emerson shows in his *Chartist's Complaint,* that magical confounding of all nature with class struggle. Consequently, the vision of white dust through which workers drill swiftly to their deaths, for all the abstract terror of its sharp line and value, is out of scale like the landscape of *The Slave in the Dismal Swamp* of Longfellow who, knowing less about exploitation than she, was likewise distracted from the difficult human to easy nature.

Yet Longfellow knew much. Not merely small points,—how to rhyme where we inclined toward muteness, but big points of methodology. He is remarkable. *Paul Revere's Ride* is a paradigm of a conjugation of political narrative poetry. Actually bare of any content but the most poetically abstract, it tells all readers everything, but yet closes with what winning courtesy, telling us we already knew it all! In every particular, what a contrast it makes to the prevailing manners, whose purposes are, precisely, *not* to tell a story. They do not flatter our self esteem, making

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us feel bright, meeting us with knowledge, but rather do they browbeat us by making us feel stupid even before their rude erudition. They deal with such open or closed secrets as compel a dislocation of the hierarchy of governing and subordinate clauses which would be the envy of a Statler Hotel after-dinner speaker, did they not contrive a more offensive tone of snob superiority. This taste is so alien to Rukeyser's purpose that she is a least offender but her least, nonetheless, harms her work. Particularly when it goes telegraphic and lets the subject, object, verb be taken for granted, or at any rate, omitted. Such methods rise under the accepted canon of culture of a ruling class, but, where the purpose be to win adherents from across classes to an unaccepted canon, they do only for subjects (love, death, etc.) where stores of reference are available to anyone. Rukeyser's exquisite *Night Music,* from private reference, reaches bold revolutionary conclusion. Here is a poem no capitalist would write. *The Cruise* in 18 pages of nice evocations of the *Flying Dutchman* and the *Hunting of the Snark* leaves undone what is done in one page of the third movement of *Night Music.*

Philistines unsnubbed would dismiss the poem as obscure. That is because it recognizes mysteries and wrestles with them, which is a different matter from willful mystification, although indistinguishable to persons who have stultified their interior references. Poets need care little if they be called obscure by Philistines. One political use of poetry is to single out the body of the elect, but if poetry actually is obscure it fails; and in our age, when economic contradictions are charged with many meanings and society is confronted with a choice of futures, obscurity is a natural characteristic of literature which wise writers must work against, and most especially in social revolutionary subject matter. All things long pursued lead through that door. Leave the timid their obscurity. Confront communication. It devolves upon us to rediscover clarity. Revolutionary writing in the snob style does not reach a proper audience. We can find examples in no academic bourgeois decay, but in experimental masters of all rising classes that struggled through the centuries for mastery.

JOHN WHEELWRIGHT

NO MORE SWANS

A SOUTHERN HARVEST. *Edited by Robert Penn Warren. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.* $2.50.

In Mr. Warren's introduction to this collection of short stories from the South one feels immediately a defensive attitude, as if the "Renaissance" which he describes, when forced to appear outside its special meeting-place, were not quite sure of its values. What is a Southern writer, he asks? what is the meaning of this Renaissance? The answers,

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particularly when applied to the fiction at hand, fall somewhat short of a definition. "The South has been engaged in a process of self-scrutiny and self-definition. . . . Much of this new literature, fiction and poetry, displays a strong historical bias." But this is not to be confused with the sociological fervors of the North. These writers, Mr. Warren continues, "have been trying to explore in the human terms of their art the same materials which have engaged, in other terms, the historians, the politician, the labor organizer, the banker and the sociologist. . . . " They "have abjured the straight realistic approach." All of which applies equally to the best writing done recently not only in other sections of the United States but also in England, France, and perhaps China as well, as the editor seems to realize for he hastens to add parenthetically that "this quality does not, of course, belong exclusively to the fiction of Southern writers." We can only deduce, then, that what does belong to them "exclusively" is nothing but a hyper-sensitive resistance to Marxism, and that in spite of this resistance many of them are so much more of their time than of their region that their work forms part of the general direction of writing everywhere.

Coming to the stories themselves, however, we are struck by one difference—the one quality which, unfortunately, does brand this volume as Southern—exemplified in the extraordinary proportion of stories published here whose true motive and inspirational center lies in nostalgia for a way of life that is gone. This is the voice of the defeated area, speaking most feelingly, in an atmosphere of hush, as if a beautiful girl had died and one could not believe that she will not appear again, her arms full of flowers. Nothing more than this, if the volume is to be taken as representative, is the "historical bias" of which Mr. Warren writes. (It is true that essays published in the *Southern Review,* edited by Mr. Warren, have been a form of historical self-scrutiny, but we are forced to deal here with their alleged counterpart in fiction.) At its best, as in Allen Tate's story "The Immortal Woman," this process of nostalgic re-creation is carried out with a delicacy and awe that are compelling. This story of a paralytic gradually piecing together the past life of the house across the street, is kept alive by the sad knocking together, in a moment of time, of the present monument (the crazy old lady) and the beautiful dead fact. The material is thus lifted beyond locale to a human impulse that is worth more of such contemplation. Stark Young's story however, with much the same motivation, has none of this sweet incongruity—being a piece of repair work on a spiritual ruin where there are "no more swans these days and no more peach brandy"—and Elizabeth Madox Roberts, who was once capable of a fine lyric energy, is represented here by the confusion of angry symbols into which, in the last few years, that energy has turned.

Such stories (John Peale Bishop, Lyle Saxon and others) constitute almost half of the volume. The rest, leaving out two or three that would be excellent by any standard, are "Southern" only in a geographical sense, exemplifying the aimless and tricky realism sponsored by Mr.

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O'Brien and *Story* magazine. Here we have that cataloguing of types which, if rural, gets dignified with the pitiful epithet of regionalism and which proves only that the writer's awareness is not much more profound than that of his (usually sub-mental) characters. In "The Ginsing Gatherers," for example, Howell Vines' attempt to preach a poetic manner of living is towed under by his endless haphazard accumulation of detail, so that one is left with nothing but a messy impression of how a certain kind of people live in a certain place. William Faulkner, whose story here is hardly indicative of his true quality, also represents this limitation and its antithesis: the attempt, by means of brutality, to get out of the intellectual straight-jacket of his regionalism. And the effect of Caldwell's very successful story "Kneel to the Rising Sun" (successful within the pattern that he has proposed) is cut off by the same incapacity, the very horror that he evokes being as local as a barn-dance, without principle and therefore without real compulsion. This is not to say, of course, that the writer must "stretch" his material to give it significance. The fault is one of consciousness, or aversion to it: "The Horn That Called Bambine," though suffering from the tendency toward illiteracy developed by the regionalists, derives its quiet power precisely from the fact that Miss Godchaux has perceived her characters from a firm set of values, and therefore has not needed to make them grotesque.

Such shortcomings are less, I believe, a reflection on Mr. Warren's editing (He has made the *Southern Review* one of the few magazines in this country worth serious attention) than on his definitions, and, more pertinently, on the general situation of creative writing at the present time. The dilemma is not regional, nor has the answer been found in one place rather than another. Katherine Anne Porter, for instance, is of the South, but this does not give her measure or affinities, which are more with Katherine Mansfield and the tradition of French realism than with her fellow-Southerners in this volume. It would be hard to find a better illustration of this, among her shorter work, than "He." In this story, by means of cadence, innuendo, and seemingly careless dialogue, she has gradually built up the whole emotional and economic complex of a family torn by affection for their idiot son, poverty, and the desire to keep up some last shred of social front. She has avoided the sentimentality always so close to such material and apparently so dear to her compatriots, and what emerges as a dominant quality is simply completeness of understanding and expression: a quality that she holds in common with any great writer, and that is surely far more worthy of critical thought than any allegiance, however well-intentioned, to the regional present or the long-lost swan-decorated past.

ELEANOR CLARK

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RIPOSTES

MINUTIAE OF LEFT-WING LITERARY HISTORY

THE Communist Party—the *New Masses* in the literary field—is never content to "prove conclusively" that all critics of Moscow executions, the People's Front or the American Writers Congress are Fascist agents. The charge is added that the culprits are old hands at the game. Whoso applauds what the C.P. does, he is an old Bolshevik, or at least an honest fellow whose innate worth the Bolsheviks always sensed. The grumbler is a pre-destined "enemy of mankind," long since branded an obstacle to human progress. A glance at the *New Masses*' earliest volumes (1926-27) hardly confirms the contention in some leading cases.

During those years, the *New Masses* published 268 signed contributions by 150 writers. Seventeen of the writers (11%) who are today "enemies of mankind" contributed 53 of the items (19%). Of the 106 writers making one appearance each in the period, six are now "enemies." Another 81 items (33%) were by 34 writers who appeared from two to four times each. Of these, five—Leon Trotsky, Edmund Wilson, V. F. Calverton, Travers Clements, Arnold Roller—are now "enemies"; three others—C. E. S. Wood, Witter Bynner and Waldo Frank—are suspect, having questioned the Moscow treason court. The remaining 80 items (29%) were by an active core of 10 writers, each appearing five or more times. Of these, two—Max Eastman and James Rorty—are now confirmed "enemies of mankind," and one, John Dos Passos, is doomed. Two writers contributed more than 10 times each: one was Mike Gold, pillar of orthodoxy, the other, James Rorty, limb of Satan. Moving down the columns in the accompanying table, the importance of the categories to the life of any magazine increases. Simultaneously, the relative weight of the future "enemies of mankind" tends to increase. Thus, 5-time contributors (III) had a 25% higher chance of becoming "enemies" than did 2-to-4-time contributors (II). Whoever contributed but once (I) was almost predestined not to become an "enemy." Those in the most important category (VI) had an even chance of becoming "enemies."*

	Total	*"Enemies of Mankind"*	*% "Enemies of Mankind"*
I. Contributed 1 item	106	6	5.5
II. Contributed 2 to 4	34	8	26.5
III. Contributed 5 or more	10	3	33.33
IV. Members Executive Board	15	3	20
V. Editors	6	2	33.33
VI. Editor, also on Board, and contributed 10 items or more	2	1	50

* Would it seem that whoever did not write at all for the *New Masses*

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The quantitative tendency is clear. Judgments of literary and intellectual quality are another matter. Certainly one cannot contemplate Calverton's sex symposia of the late '20s without a shudder, nor do all Waldo Frank's current declarations exclude wonder that the C.P. regards him as an enemy. But what the young *New Masses* thought of present-day friends and enemies is not without historical interest. A glance at a few issues is illuminating.

Ernest Hemingway was the leading performer at the latest Writers Congress. In 1926, E. Walsh, reviewing *Torrents of Spring,* called it "the cheapest book I have ever read," and Dos Passos, reviewing *The Sun Also Rises,* exclaimed, "What is the matter with American writing?" In 1928 Gold gave an extended official view: "There is no humanity in Hemingway," he declared. He is as "heartless as a tabloid" and affects aloofness as the "last refuge of a scoundrel." "Hemingway will soon exhaust the illusion that he is a brainless prize-fighter and since he is too bourgeois to accept the labor world, I predict he will (seek) Nirvana in the Catholic Church." Did proletarian criticism "save" Hemingway? Well, today he supports the Spanish People's Front and, perhaps without entirely abandoning pugilistic inclinations, is, I am told, a Catholic communicant.

Carl Sandburg, Archibald MacLeish, Lewis Mumford and Carlton Beals* are also pillars of the Congress. Sandburg was formerly taken to task as "a sentimental American nationalist" (Gold, 1926); MacLeish as a "representative of the class view of the bourgeois intelligentsia" busily sprinkling "waters of mysticism" (*New Masses,* 1932); Mumford as one who "conceals the actual class-relationships" (Dennen, 1933); and Beals as a supporter of the Latin-American "capitalist regime with all its terror and exploitation" (A. Gregory, 1932). How the rakes have reformed!

Few writers are today as popular with the C.P. as Heywood Broun. In 1930 Bill Gropper portrayed him as a boozy gambler and Gold, looking on him, exclaimed, "what degeneracy!" Broun had already made an admirable record in the Sacco-Vanzetti struggle; since then he has exchanged compliments with the *Daily Worker,* made his first visit to the Saratoga race-track, and rebuked Bill Green for not liking Martinis or understanding horses. Two equally popular European favorites of the *New Masses* are Thomas Mann, who is praised because he believes

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in 1926-27, when the left-wing movement was ignored or despised by most literary gentlemen, was in a fair way to becoming President of the Writers Congress a decade after? The Congress has had two Presidents. One, Donald Ogden Stewart, did not publish in the period under consideration. Waldo Frank made two small contributions; in 1937 he became suspect and disappeared from office before his term ended.

* Beals, by the way, has also just been acclaimed by the Berlin organ of the "Anti-Bolshevik World Movement" for withdrawing from the Dewey Commission of Inquiry into the Moscow charges against Trotsky. Vide *Contra-Komintern,* 1937, p. 423. This ought to make him eligible for the presidency of the Congress.

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"democracy" should protect itself with dictatorial elements, and Lion Feuchtwanger, who leads the international literary assault on literary critics of the U.S.S.R. Not long ago Obed Brooks found Mann "completely and critically class-conscious as a member of the bourgeoisie," while Paul Peters labeled Feuchtwanger a "wishy-washy, impotent liberal." *Le plus ca change, le plus c'est la meme chose.*

The picture is incomplete without some of yesteryear's *New Masses* estimates of well-known members of the Order of Enemies of Mankind.

In 1927 Harbor Allen named three poets whose songs of "steel, smoke, iron noise, city, soil" had an exemplary "flavor that nips and tingles." One was Gold. The others were William Ellery Leonard and James Rorty, both Order of E. M. The *New Masses* favorably noticed books by Suzanne La Follette, Charles R. Walker, Charles Yale Harrison, and V. F. Calverton. The praise of these leading members of the Order of E. M. was penned by the late Paxton Hibben, Bernard Smith, M. P. Levy, Bennet Stevens and Joseph Freeman. Robert Dunn, Director of Labor Research, credited Walker with being "largely responsible" for the second writers' delegation to the Harlan coal fields. In 1932 Edwin Seaver found Edmund Wilson, now Order of E. M., to be "a new and vital tendency." When early the following year the editors arranged an anti-Nazi symposium, four of the 14 invited contributors were Waldo Frank and Horace Kallen (now candidates for the Order) and Sidney Hook and the indefatigable Rorty, both officers of the Order. In March 1934, the editors scolded Prof. Meyer Schapiro and John Chamberlain for not realizing how deeply and rightly the workers hated Fiorello La Guardia; today the editors support La Guardia—while Schapiro and Chamberlain are confirmed members of the Order of E. M.

But there is more. In 1933 Edward Sagarin wrote as follows about André Gide (in the *New Masses,* be assured):

> "Nothing is so odious to him as the lie. He would not resort to mendacity even if it could 'prove' what is most dear to him . . . master of French prose and leader of French thought. . . . What is really inspiring is the fervor with which Gide has gone left. He does not mince his words, he leaves no room for doubt, no chance in case of a crisis, to retreat. He has committed himself openly and sincerely . . . a great gain for the left-wing movement . . . of the entire world."

Gide has since criticized Stalinist culture in and out of the U.S.S.R., and expressed agreement with some of Trotsky's views. He has been declared a deep-dyed liar and promoted Commander of the French Lodge, Order of E. M. In June 1927—this gets warmer—the editors wrote:

> " 'What the *New Masses* needs is a Max Eastman!' say hosts of critics, who will be elated to know that Max Eastman has returned from abroad, that he is a member of the *New Masses* Executive Board, and that he promises to be a frequent contributor."

Now we are hot—but getting hotter. In October 1926, Gold wrote of the Grand International Commander of the Order of the Enemies of Mankind as follows and *ad nauseam*:

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"This man is almost as universal as Leonardo da Vinci . . . energy alone creates an American Rotarian; but it is the spirit of the Revolution that works and ferments in Trotsky, as it once fermented in Danton, Voltaire, Shelley, Blake, Walt Whitman and John Brown."

In June of the same year, the editors published an article by Trotsky, an appreciation of the poet Yessenin, written just after his suicide; the article proved, said the editors, that Trotsky is not only "an economist and revolutionary general," but also "a deep lover of poetry." But stop! Joseph Freeman set things right, denouncing Trotsky's rather favorable estimate of Yessenin. It seems Yessenin was a punk—and Freeman "proved" it by long quotations from . . . Nikolai Bukharin.

HERBERT SOLOW

CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editors:

The copy of PARTISAN REVIEW reached me, and I think it is a fine magazine, and this was an excellent number. I have not in the least been disturbed by the political tone, and am not convinced that every one who has a quarrel with the *New Masses* is per se a Trotskyist or indeed anti-Soviet. . . . I am pretty sick of name-calling, anyway. And I don't like thuggish tactics no matter how noble the aims—Page 61 of your January number is hair-raising. ["The Case of William Carlos Williams" —Ed.] . . . Myself, I was brought up Catholic with a Jesuit instructor and confessor, and I learned one thing well: *the end does not justify the means.* If that is not quite what I was supposed to learn, it is a pity, of course. . . . Doing evil that good may come is the most obvious of all fallacies. The good is problematical, no one can guarantee it: but the end having once been gained, the habit of doing evil remains. Let me tell you frankly, I am not a Trotskyist, but I am not a Stalinist, either. (According to the *New Masses* line of reasoning, I suppose this makes of me a Fascist, or a Hitlerite, or an advocate of lynching, or a capitalist, or an anti-Semite, or a person who beats children. Oddly enough, I am none of these things, either.) And some of the reasons for this, after all my years of intense sympathy with the Soviet regime, are given very clearly and sharply in Gide's *U.S.S.R. Reconsidered.* [January, 1938, issue.—Ed.]

I am not going into this any further, at the moment. What I want to say now is that I am delighted with the PARTISAN REVIEW. . . . And I shall be very pleased to send you a story when I have one. . . .

Feb. 12, 1938. Houston, Texas KATHERINE ANNE PORTER

On the train
13 February, 1938.

Comrades:

To-night for the first time I had a chance to pick up PARTISAN REVIEW for February, 1938. Will you allow me to comment on one thing

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in this number—the *Anthology* beginning on page 11. In my opinion, as a layman, most of these poems are immature and inadequate. Nevertheless, *they should be published* because publication gives the aspiring poet a chance to see himself in print and to measure his worth against his peers.

In almost all publications those who have arrived get published and the others do not. If PARTISAN REVIEW does nothing more than give the writer-on-the-make a chance to be heard, it will be worth twice the price of admission.

We need more writers and better writers on the left. More power to your paper in helping to train them by giving them an outlet in print.

Fraternally yours,

SCOTT NEARING

Jean Helion writes from Alexandria, Va.: "Abstract artists are usually extremely dreamy, pretentious and ignorant in their writing, and thus provoke opposition where there would be none. The works must be presented as they *are* and not as they aim to be. The public wants realities. Theories are interesting for us only. The public must not be asked to choose between the past and the new art. What is needed is objective writing such as you do in PARTISAN REVIEW."

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